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Studies in Central Park by Kaffe Fassett

Translated by Henry Kamen

THE NOBEL PRIZE

I've fallen beast-like in a snare:
Light, people, freedom, somewhere bide;
But at my back I hear the chase
And there is no escape outside.

Darkest wood and lakeside shore,
Gaunt trunk of a levelled tree,
My way is cut off on all sides:
Let what may, come; all's one to me.
Is there some ill I have committed?
Am I a murderer, miscreant?
For I have made the whole world weep
Over the beauty of my land.

But even at the very grave
I trust the time shall come to be
When over malice, over wong,
The good will win its victory.

AUTUMN

I have allowed my family to scatter,
All those who were my dearest to depart,
And once again an agelong loneliness
Comes in to fill all nature and my heart.

Alone this cottage shelters me and you:
The wood is an unpeopled wilderness
And ways and footpaths wear, as in the song,
Weeds almost overgrowing each recess;

And where we sit together by ourselves
The log walls gaze upon us mournfully.
We gave no promise to leap obstacles,
We shall yet face our end with honesty.

At one we'll sit, at three again we'll rise,
My book with me, your sewing in your hand,
Nor with the dawning shall we realise
When all our kissing had come to its end.

You leaves, more richly and more recklessly
Rustle your dresses, spill yourselves away,
And fill a past day's cup of bitterness
Still higher with the anguish of today!

All this delight, devotion and desire!
We'll fling ourselves into September's riot!
Immure yourself within the autumn's rustle
Entirely: go crazy, or be quiet!

How when you fall into my gentle arms
Enrobed in that silk-tasseled dressing gown
You shake the dress you wear away from you
As only coppices shake their leaves down! –

You are the blessing on my baneful way,
When life has depths worse than disease can reach,
And courage is the only root of beauty,
And it is this that draws us each to each.

IT'S UNBECOMING

It's unbecoming to have fame
For this is not what elevates,
And there's no need to keep archives
Or dote over your manuscripts;

Creation's way is – to give all,
And not to bluster or eclipse:
How mean, when you don't signify,
To be on everybody's lips!

But life must be without pretence;
Conduct your days that finally
You may indraw far-distant love
And hear the call of years to be.

And gaps you leave must not be found
Amid your papers, but in fate:
A whole life's chapters and contents
You may correct or annotate.

Plunge then into obscurity,
Concealing in it every pace
Just as the landscape disappears
Into the fog, and leaves no trace.

Others along the living trail
Will step by step pursue your way,
Yet you yourself must not discern
What is defeat, what victory:

And never for a single instant
Betray your true self, or pretend,
But be alive, and only living,
And only living to the end.

Tailpiece by Robert Rubens

A conversation with Robert Musil

by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser

The writers of this interview never knew Musil personally. They have, of course, formed a picture of him through study of his work. A recent journey took them to Vienna and elsewhere in search of direct evidence from those who had known him, and it was a remarkable, almost an uncanny, experience that each conversation afforded–conversations between, on the one side, two people with intimate knowledge of a man they had never met and, on the other, third persons who had been well acquainted with him and yet, as they all emphasized, had never truly known him. Musil was reserved, courteous, distant, and habitually well-dressed, even in his last years when he was ill, in exile, forgotten, and poor. He was a man apart, as alone as ultimately only the contemplatives are. Yet, like all contemplatives, he has a message for everyone who can read.

In the following imaginary conversation all the words attributed to Musil are translated from his own writings, many passages taken from unpublished manuscript sources. The pattern of such an interview inevitably depends on a combination of subjective and objective factors, and the compilers can only say that to the best of their knowledge and belief they have used Musil's words fairly. The imaginary conversation is a traditional literary device that has at times been used frivolously. There is no frivolity intended here.

(The interviewers are rather shy of their subject, who may, they suspect, have overheard some of their remarks about the problems he has set them since his death, not only in translating and interpreting his work, but in transcribing his manuscripts. In the half-light of limbo they cannot quite see the look on his face. His manner, however, is merely that of a reserved man who is urbanely more interested in the talk than in the talkers.)

INTERVIEWER A: Herr Dr. Musil, in the special circumstances of this interview we can't ask you what everyone most wants to know: how you would have finished *The Man Without Qualities* . . . so, really, we're neither here nor there.

MUSIL: Hereness and Nowness are infinitely overvalued. What really moves us is always–and I phrase it warily–I've always refused to seek an explanation or a name for it!–to some extent in antagonism to that mode of experience. What really moves us gets displaced by so much Here and Now, by the overpowering presence of the perpetually present moment.

A: Ah, that's what the Man without Qualities says in his defense of what he calls the abolition of reality.

INTERVIEWER B: And here we're meeting Musil under conditions of abolished reality. So it's as if we were working with imaginary numbers, and the problem is–

MUSIL:–like a bridge with only the first and last piles there. Yet one crosses it as if it were there in its entirety.

A: You mean . . . with the aid of ?

MUSIL: . . . God. The oddest thing is the fact that you can perform real operations with such imaginary values and end up with a tangible result.

A: So we're agreed, then, that we're in a realm we accept much as the mathematicians accept the square root of minus one? The answers you give are predestined, but the sequence is determined by the course of our somewhat absurd operation. Not too absurd, we hope.

MUSIL: With a limited and specific validity, reminding us of the freedom with which mathematics makes use of absurdity in order to arrive at the truth.

B: May one ask the obvious question? May we have your comments on death?

MUSIL: It's always believed that face to face with death one savours life more intensely, drinks deeper of it. The poets say so. But it's not like that. Simply–one's freed from a bondage, as it were from a stiff knee or heavy rucksack.

B: And life?

MUSIL: An unpleasant affair that one can get through by means of smoking. Treat life not as reality but as a metaphor, a symbol. At bottom all anybody loves and desires is metaphorical. The boy longs for a gold watch. The young man with the gold watch longs for the well-off suitable wife. The man with watch and wife longs for the job as managing director. But when he's successfully attained fulfilment of this little circle of wishes and is calmly swinging to and fro in it like a pendulum, somehow it seems his store of unsatisfied dreams has not diminished by one jot, for when he wants to rise above the rut of every day he will resort to metaphor and simile . . . (in a reminiscent tone) . . . Achilles and Moosbrugger, that's a metaphor. Likewise, later on, Agathe.

B: Achilles being that very early version of what later became Ulrich, the Man without Qualities. Achilles (or the slightly later version called Anders, the man who was *other*) is the logician, the cool, civilized man who also has the capacity for violence. Indeed in your early notes you said he saw his mirror-reflection in Moosbrugger, the criminal lunatic who stands for all the destructiveness in us. Surely this is a polarity not only in the world, not only in the hero himself, but also between the hero and the murderer?

MUSIL: It's two sides of him that are not yet welded together.

B: In a way what you were doing all those years was welding them together, then. Ulrich, who discovered that he 'loathed Evil', is a very different man from his predecessors Achilles and Anders. Yet he too embodies a polarity.

MUSIL: He was fighting for his salvation. He tried to put every conceivable obstacle in the way of it. And that was why he laughed and tried to mislead the rest of them by seeming to mock and exaggerate.

A: Isn't that fundamentally what *The MWQ* is 'about'?

MUSIL: The main problem is the search for the ethically complete act, for what I once ironically refer to as 100 per cent being and action . . . I try to show what I call 'the hole in European morality', which is what prevents right action: briefly, it's the wrong treatment that has been accorded to mystical experience.

A: But that didn't yet come out in your first fragmentary drafts, did it? I mean, in *The Spy* and *The Redeemer*. Achilles and Anders had to come to a bad end, obviously. When did you actually begin the work that was to turn into *The MWQ?*

MUSIL: When one takes stock of oneself, thirty years are like one year. The interlocking plans, the interlocking of plans and execution, in all that time come to form a thick, tangled skein, which gradually gets loosened up by forgetfulness. The book's beginnings go back almost to the time when I was writing my first book.

B: *Young Törless?* About 1902?

A: But can't it be traced even further back, to your attempted novel when you were seventeen?

MUSIL: (recalling the title) *The Adventures and Wanderings of a Spiritual Vivisector at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century.*

A: The result, *The MWQ,* has been called the great Austrian satire, the

historical panorama of the last days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a portrait of the times–

MUSIL: It's not the immemorially awaited great Austrian novel . . . It's not a portrait of the times. Nor is it a social study. It's not a confession, but a satire. It's not a satire–

A AND B: (interrupting) But there's satire in it! And irony. You won't deny your irony.

MUSIL: Irony means portraying one of the clergy in such a way as also to hit off a communist. To portray a fool in such a way that the author suddenly feels: damn it, that's partly me. Constructive irony. For me irony isn't a gesture indicating superiority: it's a way of conducting warfare . . . Philosophic humour, one might say. For the world's not yet ripe for seriousness . . . Irony must contain an element of suffering, otherwise it's mere smug superiority.

B: So?

MUSIL: It's not a satire but a positive construction. What interests me is intellectual patterns, what you might call the spectral aspect of events. My 'historical' novel doesn't present anything that isn't equally true today. I set out to make a contribution to the intellectual and spiritual mastery of the world, even by way of the novel. So I should be extremely glad if the public would pay less attention to my aesthetic qualities and more to my intentions.

B: By now I think most people know how you set your scene: Vienna, from autumn 1913 on into summer 1914, up to the mobilisation.

MUSIL: Which tore our world and our attitudes to shreds, past repair.

A: In 1926, you may recall, you told an interviewer that there the novel would end. But in January, 1942, you made a project for an epilogue to be spoken by a now-elderly Ulrich after the second world war. Did you ever really decide where you would stop?

MUSIL: *(perhaps sardonically)* I have a poor memory . . . One's always making plans and it's always turning out differently. The writer knows what he means only after he's done the writing.

A: Yes, from your notebooks and manuscripts one sees that's strikingly true in your own case. Well, let's keep to the book you actually wrote. The situation is: in Vienna a group of idealists and patriots, representatives of Money and Mind, organise a campaign to make the Emperor's jubilee in 1918 the occasion of Austria's liberation

from Prussian materialism and the machine age. The one thing they don't have is any sort of idea. In the end, the money collected to serve an undefined ideal of glory and peace may be allocated to a pageant celebrating Austrian beers and wines. Your hero, Ulrich, is the only person who sees it all clearly. But he doesn't *do* anything.

MUSIL: People want Ulrich to do something. But what I'm concerned with is the meaning of whatever's done. In all things concerned with high ideals mankind behaves in a way that's considerably more old-fashioned than one would expect from looking at its machines.

A: So what is the central question?

MUSIL: *How is a man with a mind to regard reality?*

B: As Ulrich's antagonist you have the millionaire from Prussia whom Ulrich meets in the salon of 'the second Diotima'. Diotima and the millionaire are elective affinities in a way that parodies the love between Ulrich and his sister Agathe, whom he meets, after many years of separation, when his father dies. When you talked about the work in progress in 1926 you spoke of Agathe as Ulrich's twin. Subsequently you made her only ideally his twin. Ulrich calls her his Siamese twin, even his 'self-love'.

MUSIL: Biologically speaking the twin sister is very rare, but she lives in all of us as a spiritual Utopian ideal, a manifest idea of our self. And what for most people remains mere yearning comes true for my hero.

B: You said a few minutes ago that Agathe is 'metaphorical'. It seems to us that she symbolizes a whole realm, which you once called 'Agathoid'.

MUSIL: Yes. The realm of the Siamese Twins and of the Millennium, where life grows in enchanted stillness like a flower . . .

A: *(excited)* Yes, yes, that's in the last chapter of the second volume, the last chapter published in your lifetime! It's there that Agathe becomes almost unearthly, yet with the scent of 'unknown plants' about her, and inspires Ulrich with the clear resolve: We'll never act on the inspiration of the moment, but only out of a condition prevailing to the last horizon.'

MUSIL: Whatever she did was direct, immediate . . . And this although she did it very gently, almost like the sound of the bow on a cello string. But in the depth that it came from there grew neither thoughts nor words . . . Her gentle actions were like a landslide in some primeval world.

B: No wonder you formulated the question as one whether to be 'practical or to seek a Madonna'.

MUSIL: *(evasively)* My mind is not very practical.

B: As you worked on the book through the 'twenties, the figure of the hero continually changed, his name changed, the plot changed, the title changed. Agathe was unchanging from the beginning. Only for a short time then she was not Agathe, the Good One, but Angèle, the Angel.

MUSIL: Not the image of a woman, but the image of my yearning for *the* woman.

A: What Jung calls the Anima?

MUSIL: Introspection and ecstatic experience reveal 'the existence of a feminine figure in the unconscious' . . . 'Eros is associative, Logos is discrimination' . . . Jung's very close to me there. One might express the Agathe-Ulrich relationship as that between *synthesizing and analytical thought.*

A: We've touched on a whole lot of things I'd like to ask you about. For instance, psychology. It always irritated you to be described as a 'psychological' writer. As a young man you worked in experimental psychology, and what you called *psychologia phantastica* didn't appeal to you. Surely because it was trying to do something very like what you were trying to do, but from another direction?

MUSIL: What psychoanalysis did was to make it possible to talk about sex (which up to then had been left to the romantics and the pornographers). That was its tremendous achievement, a tremendous contribution to civilisation. Over against that it hardly matters much how right the theory may or may not be.

B: You have been praised for quite extraordinary perception in describing sexual relationships, and above all, because this astounds people, from the woman's point of view, as in the story *The Perfecting of a Love*. There's the adolescent homosexual relationship in *Young Törless*. There's the seduction and murder in the story *Grigia*. There are all those seductions and attempted seductions and the sexual murder in *The MWQ*.

MUSIL: Here I must interpolate that despite anything that may be thought about me I was always more concerned with human beings than with women as such. My love went always to an invisible

image that I bore within myself, and what I actually experienced was not love but the spiritual slaughter that civilized people carry out in sexual passion.

B: We appreciate the ambiguity of that, since the speaker is not Herr Dr. Musil, but a fictitious first person nonetheless intimately related to him. This sort of thing is one of the many forms of duality found throughout your work. What did you say is the fundamental duality?

MUSIL: Rationality and mysticism–the two poles of the age we live in. I'm in the dubious position of having been a born soldier with monkish inclinations, ending up as a monk with soldierly inclinations who can't give up swearing!

A: Speaking of soldiers, there's something I'd like to ask about: those terrifying prefigurations of Nazi atrocites in *Törless,* which was written so long before the first world war. How do you feel about the prophetic quality of that writing?

MUSIL: Everyone experiences the symbols of his age. But it often happens that it's only afterwards that they become intelligible to him.

A: Surely the writer is especially sensitive to them?

MUSIL: One might describe him as the man who's most acutely aware of the individual's irrevocable solitariness in the world, and of the same solitariness between all human beings. His relationship to the world is best understood by starting from his opposite, the man with the fixed point *A,* the rational man in ratioïd territory. This ratioïd territory includes, roughly speaking everything that's susceptible to being reduced to a scientific system. It's ruled by the concept of solidity. But on the way from Nature to the mind one comes, as it were, out of a petrified room containing a collection of minerals and goes into a hot-house full of indefinable movement. To use the static method there calls for a quite comical technique of qualification and hypothesis, and its complexity alone makes our morality look ripe for decay. Take, for instance, the standard example of the variations on the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', from murder to manslaughter, the crime of passion, duelling, capital punishment, and so on, to war, and if you look for a unified rational formula for it, you'll find it resembles a sieve, in the use of which the holes are no less useful than the solid wires.

(Interviewers laugh in sympathy with the characteristic note on which Musil has here ended.)

A: And the a-ratioïd territory is the opposite of this?

MUSIL: There the facts, and the relationships between them, are infinite and incalculable . . . That's the writer's native territory. There's no end to the unknown quantities . . . the equations, and the potential answers. The task is to discover ever new answers, connections, constellations, variables, to set up prototypes of processes, seductive models of what mankind can be–to *invent* the interior man. I hope these examples are clear enough to exclude any thought of 'psychological' methods. Psychology belongs to the ratioïd territory . . . Since I'm anything but a sceptic, I experimented with concepts like ratioïd and a-ratioïd, and subsequently hit on the manifold relation between emotion and truth, which I've hinted at in *The MWQ*.

B: Psychology again.

MUSIL: Individual psychology and psychoanalysis are the unconscious historical means of keeping the balance with collectivity, which is on the increase everywhere. There's never been such tender concern for the person, the precious Me. Of course religion used to do what it had to do in that line, but then that was under the aegis of a moral code. Psychoanalysis has done an immense, a really immense amount to make us glimpse something typical behind the destinies of individuals.

A: There's a manuscript fragment that interests me. It says that certain episodes in the life of two lovers 'were nothing: a small visible part of something else, which did not eventuate.' Then it goes on: 'It was spring. The air was like a net. Behind it was something that made a bulge in the web, yet it could not break through. They both knew it and did not trust themselves to speak of it.' One feels the transcendental bulge, yet you deny the transcendental.

MUSIL: Let's call it 'soul', without assuming that there is such a thing. All one has to go on is what a person does.

A: Aren't *The MWQ* and other works of yours, not least your play *The Dreamers,* all about the distinction between the person and his actions?

MUSIL: The one person in oneself is recognisable only by his actions, not by the conscious mind. These actions pour out of the unconscious.

There are all sorts of influences, even in normal life, such as love, jealousy, resentment, that have the same effect as alcohol. From the point of view of the 'person' one is never responsible for one's actions . . . As Eckhart said, 'Also in Christ there was an outer and an inner man, and all that he did concerning outer things he did as of the outer man, and meanwhile the inner man stood by in immovable detachment.'

A: You said once that the saints and mystics might well have acquitted Moosbrugger, the murderer. You said they were all immoralists.

MUSIL: What are virtues to society are vices to the saint! A good man doesn't lift a finger to make the world good, he doesn't do anything at all to the world, he merely detaches himself from it.

A: You mean, he lives in what you call the Other Condition, in which there's no talent left, only genius, and the passions disappear . . .

MUSIL: . . . leaving a kind of goodness that resembles primordial fire.

A: Whereas what most people want is–?

MUSIL: Something that'll have the solitariness of genius but also the universal comprehensibility of the nightingale . . .

B: Didn't you once say there's no important idea that stupidity can't turn to account?

MUSIL: It can dress up in all truth's clothes. But truth has only one dress at a time, and one road, and is always at a disadvantage. The stupidity I was talking about is no mental disease, yet it's the most dangerous disease the mind suffers from, a threat to life itself.

B: In spite of your having explained *The MWQ,* there are critics who insist your conclusions are pessimistic.

MUSIL: On the contrary. I make fun of all the dooms and declines of the West. In our days archetypal human dreams are coming true. There's no denying that these ancient dreams have come true in a way quite different from what was once expected. Baron Münchhausen's post-horn was more picturesque than mass-produced canned music is. We've gained in terms of reality and lost in terms of the dream.

B: Doesn't this touch on Ulrich's dilemma? He's a dreamer and a man of reality.

MUSIL: A realist never . . . But if those archaic dreams, now they've come true, no longer have quite the same faces, does it matter? It

means we need a new morality to go with them, that's all. We can't make do with the old one. My novel is an attempt to offer material for such a new morality. It's an attempt at dissolving something, a hint at the synthesis of something else . . . Science had to rule out God, in order perhaps–by its own method!–to discover him. Supposing, now, this ungodliness were nothing but the appropriate way for this age to find God? . . . This book is religious in agnostic terms. It's exacting of me, I know, but I expect my work to be read twice–in detail and as a whole. A novel's main effect should be emotional. Ideas . . .there's a special difficulty here . . . ideas can't be presented in a novel the way a philosopher would present them. In a novel they're elements in a *Gestalt,* an organic pattern.

B: People wonder to what extent Ulrich is autobiographical, especially since you several times considered writing the novel in the first person.

MUSIL: That 'I' is not myself . . . nor an invented person either. It's a shifting blend of both . . . In other words, my intention is not to tell either the suprapersonal or the impersonal truth . . . nor to present my personal convictions. I treat the thing neither from all sides (which is impossible in a novel) nor one-sidedly, but from various sides that belong together.

B: Now we come to the problem of form and content, exterior and interior of a work of art.

MUSIL: It's a platitude that they constitute an indivisible unity. But *how* they do so is something less known about, in fact to some extent it just remains a mystery. At the beginning, that's to say when I wrote *Törless,* the problem simply didn't exist for me. The principle I let myself be guided by was that of the straight line as the shortest connection between two points. Say everything as shortly as possible. Use no images that don't build up the idea.

B: But that's not the principle on which you wrote your second book, *Unions.*

MUSIL: The road I decided to take there was that of the *maximum load,* of the smallest possible step, of the most gradual, imperceptible transition. That has a moral function: to display the moral spectrum with its constant transition from one thing to its opposite. But there was another principle too, a decisive one. I called it that of *motivated steps* . . . Make nothing happen (or: do nothing) that isn't of spiritual

value. In other words, do nothing causal, do nothing mechanical.

B: As a young man, when you wrote *Törless,* you hadn't read much and weren't under any literary influences?

MUSIL: Hauptmann, who was very famous even then, had too little of a mind for my taste. I didn't understand Stendhal and I didn't know Flaubert. But I did know Dostoyevsky, and I flamed with enthusiasm for him–incidentally without even wanting to get to know all his work. Young people are so odd! Or perhaps it's just that people are altogether odd!... The writers to whom I've had a specifically literary relationship are Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Hamsun, d'Annunzio, among others.

B: How about philosophy? Apart from your work on Mach, apart from your interest in Husserl and Scheler–*were* you ever influenced by Bergson?

MUSIL: I never managed to read him, because my attention was always caught by details, particularly his notion of *durée créatrice.*

A: And politics?

MUSIL: I am a malcontent. My discontent with my own country found mildly ironical expression in *The MWQ.*

A: We know you found Berlin mentally refreshing by contrast with Vienna. But you always went back to Vienna.

MUSIL: That city was besieged by the Turks and bravely defended by the Poles. In the 18th century it was the greatest of Italian cities. It is proud of its pastries, which come from Bohemia and Hungary. And for centuries it has been demonstrating the fact that one can produce very splendid and even profound things without having any character whatsoever. A country for genius to flourish in, and that was probably the ruin of it. *(In a grim aside)* The way Freud, Adler and Schoenberg were treated in their native country! But the sort of intelligence that won't put up with compromise is too annoyingly individualistic for the men who are always 'striking a balance'. I always held aloof from politics.

B: It's occasionally objected that no one has a right to do so, because politics is everyone's concern.

MUSIL: So is hygiene, but I've never made any public pronouncement on that subject either. To me writing a book seems more important than ruling an empire. Every significant work of literature has the

capacity to overthrow all the beliefs held up to that moment.

B: The novel has been in a state of crisis, apparently, for thirty years or more. What do you think of fiction's tendency to be like the patient talking to his doctor?

MUSIL: Why not like doctors among themselves, or at least like the doctor explaining things to his patient? Reading has lost its established social function. It has to some extent become a sort of vice, a 'way of passing the time'.

A: Didn't you once say that story-telling has lost its social function?

MUSIL: It's not quite so simple as that. Communists and nationalists and Catholics thoroughly enjoy being told stories. That lost need to listen to story-telling springs to life again the moment you have an established ideology. In fact, wherever you have a subject.

B: We haven't spoken yet of Rilke, who went to the same school as yourself, whom you wrote about at length and praised without qualification!

MUSIL: With Rilke it wasn't that stones or trees turned into human beings, as they always have done whenever and wherever poems have been made, but that human beings also turned into things, or into nameless entities, and so took on their ultimate humanity, with a nameless aura about it. One may say: in that great writer's sense of things everything is symbolic and–nothing is any longer merely symbolic.

B: The world is–shall we say?–symbolic. Can we say writing is a symbolic activity?

MUSIL: Writing's not an activity, it's a state.

A: But your own work isn't only a state, surely it's also a progress?

MUSIL: One man's voyage of adventure through the years 1880 onward. He travels not by any vehicle, but on the currents of thought and memory.

A: And now you're well out on the high seas. The fame you knew would come after you died is extending all the time, and rapidly. Several of your works are already translated into English. The Italians and the French have begun translating you and lecturing about you. Critics discuss your work. Ph. D. theses are now written about it. Universities and American foundations give grants for research into your posthumous papers . . .

MUSIL *(cutting this short)*: The popularity enjoyed by posthumous papers doubtless has something to do with readers' pardonable weakness for a writer who engages their attention for the last time.

B: After all the frustration and bitterness, aren't you a little pleased?

MUSIL *(with an ambiguity all his own)*: I'm temperamentally ungrateful.

A: And specifically ungrateful for being interviewed? We'd like to tell you we are grateful for the opportunity–

MUSIL *(rising)*: The interview is the art-form of our era. Don't you see, the capitalistically delightful characteristic of an interview is this: the interviewee does all the work and gets nothing for it, whereas the interviewer actually does nothing at all and is paid a fee all the same. *(With this little irony, lightly and gracefully bestowed on the two who have copied down so many of his words, the subject of this interview, the occasion of this excursion into an elusive realm, moves off into his fastness, leaving them, as he has left all who knew his work and himself, with a sense of final impenetrability and a search always for something beyond the horizon.)*

A NOTE ON ROBERT MUSIL

Robert Musil (1880–1942) is the outsider *par excellence,* a man both involuntarily and deliberately at a remove from his fellow-men. His protagonists are always, like himself, beings apart – some of them grotesquely, pathologically so, some them heroically so: what he called 'the Trappists of modern life'. That phrase is characteristic of his love of intellectual hardship. All his work, and above all his last and most important book, *The Man Without Qualities,* is an experiment in presenting the interior problems, the real problems, of our time in terms of 'endless perspectives' and in the light of his 'sense of possibility'. He believed mankind to be on the frontiers of some utterly new way of thinking and feeling, some intenser, richer, more highly organized form of living. Therefore he was deeply concerned with the nature of genius, as with the *intuitus mysticus,* both of which offer glimpses of that future when life will 'exact' in the sense intended by Thomas à Kempis – which is also Musil's own sense.

In keeping with the ambiguity and ambivalence prevailing throughout his work, the method he used is twofold: now rational, logical, now imagi-

native, intuitive. An agnostic who had not believed in God since the age of 8, he once defined his aim as 'shortening the distance to God'.

Scientifically trained as an engineer, and as an experimental psychologist, and an amateur mathematician, he wrote to a very large extent about the most elusive states of mind. A solitary and dedicated man, he was interested not only in all that is solitary but also in the massive, the total–not least as manifested in the behaviour of crowds. In his private life he was anti-bohemian and somewhat austere, with a cult of physical fitness that verged on extravagance and which was the cause of his untimely death; in his work the treatment of sexual experience ranges through the depraved, the perverse, the revulsions of puritanical disgust, and the most tender sublimity, as well as every sort of symbolic complexity. He is at once one of the most ruthlessly serious and dedicated and one of the wittiest and most amusing of modern European writers. Two aspects of his work that are scarcely represented in what is so far available in translation are his exquisite awareness of landscape and his metaphysical sympathy with animals: a sick cat, a mouse on a mountainside under shellfire, and, again and again, horses.

Musil, who naturally thought of himself as a German writer, was born an Austrian, of German-Bohemian stock. He was intended for the army, but became an engineer and subsequently took a degree in philosophy. He then abandoned the academic world, to become a freelance writer. After losing his private means in the inflation, he became acquainted with poverty, and in his last years, in exile, was almost destitute, dependent on the generosity of a few friends and admirers. His circle was always small, his habits aloof and solitary. He was an only child, and there were no children of his marriage. At his death the world seemed to have forgotten him.

Musil's first novel, *Young Törless,* was a considerable success, and the acclaim accorded it on its publication in 1906 was what made him decide against a career as a professional philosopher. His second work, *Unions,* 1911, was a small volume containing two long stories at once hermeneutic (Musil's own word for them, many years later) and hermetic; the critics were disconcerted. His reputation was however now such that he was invited to join the editorial staff of a leading literary journal, *Die Neue Rundschau,* in Berlin, where he remained until the outbreak of war in 1914. He served as an officer in the Austrian

army, on the Italian front, and received several high decorations for gallantry and distinguished service (which to him were, like his inherited title of *noblesse de robe,* irrelevant pomps and vanities to be passed over in silence; nor does he seem to have attached any importance to the literary prizes bestowed on him). After 1918 he had an appointment first in the Austrian Foreign Ministry, then in the War Ministry, each the source of satirical observations in his last novel. Besides writing dramatic criticism and continuing to publish occasional essays, he now began a series of experiments in the great novel that had been his main project since boyhood and which was to occupy him ever more exclusively for the rest of his life. All the other works of his maturity are indirect contributions to its development. Indeed he himself said that the key to it was in his drama, *The Dreamers.* This play was published in 1921; it was not performed until 1929 and then only for one night, as a result of its author's outraged protest at the indiscriminate cutting and violation of his exacting requirements. In 1924 a second play was published, the farce *Vincent and the Lady whose Friends were Men of Distinction,* and was given productions in Berlin, Vienna, and Prague. Both these plays have been produced several times in recent years, in Germany and in Vienna, *Vincent* in a radio adaptation by the poet Ingeborg Bachmann. Likewise in 1924 a volume of stories appeared, *Three Women,* Two of them, *The Portuguese Lady* and *Grigia,* had been published in separate volumes the previous year. Apart from critical essays too numerous to list here, the rest of Musil's publications fall into two groups. One consists of the memorial address in honour of Rilke, 1927; a small collection of sketches and impressions entitled *Literary Remains of a Living Man,* 1936; a lecture *On Stupidity,* 1937; and, in the same year, a collection of aphorisms, *Jottings.* The other consists of the great philosophical novel for ever unfinished, *The Man Without Qualities.*

Grown out of Musil's fragmentary novels of the 'twenties, and having undergone radical changes of conception and an immense amount of rewriting, the first volume of this major work was finally published in 1930. (To this correspond the first two volumes of the English translation.) Volume II was published in 1933, at the very time the Nazis came to power. Musil left Germany; his notes at the time reveal how clearly he saw what was happening – and indeed he had prophetically

delineated the psychic forces at work, in his novel *Törless,* at the beginning of the century. For him personally the general European disaster had an ironical twist: at the very moment when his literary triumph seemed achieved, he was driven back, by his own inability to compromise politically or in any other way, into a small German-speaking territory with a small reading public. And even that was for a short time. When the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938, he went into voluntary exile – temporarily in Italy, which he had often visited, and then finally to Switzerland. There, in obscurity, he worked at the continuation of the book towards which his whole life and all his writing had been leading. A third volume, continuing Book II, with its sub-title *Into the Millennium,* he had withdrawn from the press in order to revise and extend it, and after the outbreak of the second world war, an ageing man with no more hope of worldly success, he went on, perfectionist as he was, revising, elaborating, and expanding. What was left at his sudden death in 1942 is not a novel cut off in the way that, say, *The Ivory Tower* is, or *Lucien Leuwen,* but a visionary progress of quite another kind. The tantalising mass of posthumous material we are left with, the drafts and plans and fragments, now alternative to each other, now cancelling each other out, and to a large extent dating back to the period of the book's inception in about 1920, bears witness to the inexorable devotion with which Musil ceaselessly struggled, experimented, rejected, and worked his way always on to intenser clarity, with an aspiration at once so single-minded and so ironical as to exclude the thought of tragedy. The work was like a great river. In the last, posthumous chapters, the flowing was ever more slowly and calmly as it opened out into that millennial state of mind which Musil called 'the sea of immobility'; by its very nature it was without an end.

The Marvelous Attic | by William Weaver

A Report on Rome's Minor Museums

I have a friend who collects zoos. The first time he went to Paris, before taking a look at the Louvre or Nôtre-Dame, he headed straight for the Jardin des Plantes. He knows how to say 'Where is the sloth?' in

German, though he has trouble ordering a glass of beer. And when he feels depressed or at loose ends, he heads promptly for the nearest zoo, where he spends an hour or so watching the seals or throwing peanuts to the polar bears–after which he is restored in body and spirit.

I am that way about museums. Just as certain people have an all-inclusive love of babies or cats, I have a completely undiscriminating passion for the past. The museums I prefer are not the great galleries like the Uffizi or Venice's Accademia–though I enjoy them, too–but rather those generally somber and shoddy buildings where rows of dusty glass cases contain the odds and ends that history has left in its wake: the cup from which a king drank poison, a fading lock of blond hair from the head of a famous beauty, the gun with which some bandit shot five policemen before meeting his death, or a Bible with a bullet lodged half-way through the Old Testament. I derive the same pleasure from a morning looking at old curios that a child experiences in an afternoon in the attic of an old family house.

Fortunately, for several years now I have been living in Rome, which is a paradise for those affected by this museumophilia. In the first place, the museums here are numerous–I calculate that I've visited more than two dozen–and at the same time, many of them are difficult to find and hard to get inside. For the museum-lover, these difficulties only add an extra seasoning of delight to the quest.

The large and great museums–like the Vatican and the Baths of Diocletian–I see regularly with tourist friends, who want to hit Rome's cultural high-spots. But since tourists are seldom in the city for more than a few days, I rarely suggest my secret favorites to them: The Missionary Museum or the Museum of Rome or the Napoleonic Museum.

Still, these minor museums are more than mere curiosities, and more than just fun for those, like me, who enjoy the silence of shadowy corridors and ill-assorted heaps of souvenirs. Instead, these odd collections often provide an unexpected vantage-point from which you can catch a new and singular glimpse of the past of Rome.

Museum-lovers are seldom systematic, but if I were making a list of Rome's minor museums, I would begin logically with the Museo della Civiltà Romana–the Museum of (Ancient) Roman Civilization. By an amusing stroke of irony, this guide to ancient Rome is situated

in the shiniest new suburb of modern Rome, the E.U.R. district, a zone planned by Mussolini as the site of a permanent exposition grounds. The original exposition was never held, because of the war, but in the last few years, Roman builders have created a somewhat stark and expensive group of apartment houses, scattered around the Fascist-style public buildings, in one of which the Museum is housed.

For the museumophile, the approach to a museum and its situation can be as important as its contents. The Museo della Civiltà Romana can be reached by a pleasant ride on Rome's gleaming subway, and I entered it well-disposed. It turned out to be an excellent museum. The curious aspect of it, however, is that there is not an original piece in it: it is a collection of plaster casts. But these are arranged with system and intelligence to give a comprehensive, departmentalized view of life in ancient Rome. In fact, it is a good idea to come here before making the ritual trips to Pompeii and Ostia and the great collections of Roman art in the Vatican and the Baths of Diocletian. After examining the various rooms at the E.U.R. museum, labeled 'Religion', 'Home Life', 'Theatres', and so on, one can relate the remains of Rome to some general idea of what it must have been like to be a Roman.

The modern Roman—even an adopted American one—can also enjoy the museum's scale model of Rome at the time of Constantine. This model has a room to itself and a raised gallery around it, from which you have a kind of helicopter-view of the ancient capital, with its elegant disposition of baths and forums and circuses. Suddenly, as you look at it, you are able to superimpose the modern city: that hill becomes the Campidoglio, that theatre becomes Piazza Navona.

The other treat in the collection is the series of casts of the sections of Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius's columns—so that you can see at last, up close, the winding, sculptured stories which, on the real columns, are impressive but impossible to decipher.

In another shiny building of the E.U.R. district there is another good museum, which makes an interesting contrast to the refinement and sophistication of *la civiltà romana;* this is the Museo delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari, or in other words, folk-lore and handicrafts. *Folclore,* as it's called in Italian, usually means to me bad voices singing unintelligible ballads and tacky rugs in brightly-colored stripes. But there is little of this sort of thing in the museum in question. Here, simple

objects constructed by the farmers and shepherds and fishermen of Italy through the centuries bear witness to the Italian's seemingly innate sense of design and elegance and, at the same time, to the piety which is one of the bases of Italian life.

The very first room of the collection contains models of the elaborate, colorful constructions that are made in various Italian towns for carrying around the statue of the local patron saint on his feast-day: a huge baroque pillar for Santa Rosa in Viterbo, a kind of boat for San Paolino in Nola. Then a series of rooms entitled 'The Cycle of the Year' displays the traditional paraphernalia of the year's holidays: crèches from Naples in which the Christ child seems to be born in the midst of a crowded *vicolo* off the via Roma, simple but stylish cages for catching crickets–bearers of good luck–in Florence on Ascension Day, breads and cakes baked in special, odd shapes (including a multi-breasted Diana) for other holidays. A second cycle, devoted to the events of human life, shows beautifully-woven swaddling clothes–some saying *Buon Giorno,* others *Viva l'Italia*–then heavily-decorated wedding-clothes, and illustrations of funeral customs.

Unlike most Roman museums, this collection is kept in big rooms with clean windows and assiduous guards, who press buttons that make some displays turn around or else cause folk-songs to issue forth from concealed gramophones. The glossiness of the installation contrasts with the homeliness of many of the objects: the worn spoons, the rain-stained saddles, the faded, painted sails from Sicilian fishing-boats, the spindles, and shepherd's flasks made from gourds, the majolica plates, and the oil-lamps–all made for use, for the exigencies of everyday life, and not for a museum.

But bright lights and orderly rooms are basically opposed to the kind of museum-going the true addict enjoys, and for him a visit to the Castel Sant' Angelo is indicated, rather than the trip to the E.U.R. collections. Though it dates from the second century A.D. (when it was erected by Hadrian to be his tomb), the atmosphere of the place is more redolent of the dark ages than of the Roman Empire. The guides, with unconcealed morbidness, show you the *oubliettes,* the prison cells where Giordano Bruno and Beatrice Cenci were confined before their executions, and the *ossario,* the common grave where executed criminals' bodies were given summary burial. For the rest, the building contains

fascinating room-fuls of arms and armor, and you can wander freely along the gloomy corridors, through vast *saloni,* and the ramparts where Benvenuto Cellini fought, and Tosca presumably committed suicide, and where Saint Gregory the Great saw an angel sheathing his sword, signifying the end a of pestilence that was raging in Rome.

Rome–as Castel Sant' Angelo reminds us–was a city of battles and soldiers, Borgias and saints. But it was also a city of poets, and two of its most moving little museums pay tribute to this aspect of the city's history: the Museo Tassiano and the Keats House. Both Tasso and Keats died in Rome, and both in particularly moving circumstances. After years of peregrinations and recurring mental illness, the great Tasso had found haven in Rome, where Clement VIII arranged to give him a poet's crown in the Capitoline Palace. But the day before the ceremony, the poet died–April 25, 1595–in the monastery of Sant' Onofrio on the western slope of the Janiculum hill. Visitors to Sant' Onofrio today are shown the poet's death mask, his chair, his mirror, and editions of his works. And after a visit to his cell, you can walk a little further up the hill to 'Tasso's oak', a gnarled ilex-tree planted on the spot where, in his last months, the poet used to sit under an ilex and look down on the magnificent panorama of the city.

Keats's death was more premature than Tasso's (who lived to be fifty-one) and more heart-breaking, and a visit to his rooms in Piazza di Spagna, with their fine view, is a disturbing experience. Affectionately tended by the custodian, Signora Vera Cacciatore, a poet, the little museum has an immediacy about it that makes you feel the poet died there last week and not in the cold winter of 1821. There is Severn's death-bed sketch of him and the letter describing the end and quoting his last words: 'Severn, lift me up, for I am dying. I shall die easy. Don't be frightened! Thank God it has come'. Other paintings of Severn's show the pastoral Rome of those days, which Keats never was able to enjoy; and a particularly sweet painting shows Shelley in the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, a notebook open on his knee, composing 'Prometheus Unbound'.

This calm and pastel Rome that poets and artists flocked to in the nineteenth century is copiously illustrated in the Museo di Roma, which is located in the handsome Palazzo Braschi, built in the 1700's for the nephews of the Braschi pope, Pius VI–the last papal family to construct

a palace in Rome. On the ground floor, in fact, there are various souvenirs of the popes: Leo XIII's gold barouche, a plaster donkey wearing fancy scarlet trappings which Pius IX used on a live donkey, and–the most amusing curiosity in the collection–Pius IX's private train, built for him in France in 1858, decorated in iron art-nouveau, and furnished with over-stuffed thrones, Aubusson carpets, much fringe and tassels and plush.

One of the prides of the museum are the 'Roman scenes', a group of vignettes of Roman life, using life-size dummies, enacting typical aspects of early nineteenth-century Roman life: an *osteria* with wine-drinkers and waiters, a landscape where a couple dance the *saltarello* (a Roman version of the *tarantella*), a pharmacy, the stall of the public scribe. Similar scenes are repeated in the paintings and prints housed on the upper floors, where rooms dedicated to 'Carnival', 'Games', and so on, give a vivid impression of the simple pleasures of Papal Rome (my favorite room is the horse-racing one, with stylish portraits of rolling-eyed horses and dashing scenes of riderless races along the Corso). Another room is devoted to 'The Tiber', in a series of Romantic river-scapes that fill with nostalgia the present-day Roman, used to the din of trams and traffic along the river.

A grimmer side of nineteenth-century Italy is illustrated in other small museums. The Grenadiers, the Bersaglieri, and the Carabinieri all have museums, filled with bloody reminders of modern Italy's wars; and the Museo del Risorgimento commemorates the great nineteenth-century struggle for unification. To tell the truth, this Museum is not exactly open. The Center for Risorgimento Studies consists of the Museum and a Library-Archive. The latter is in order and open to the public; funds for the former have never been appropriated, though the museum material is all collected and ready to be exhibited. It's worth a visit to the Archive, at any rate, for its location–if for no more serious reason. It is situated in the top layer of the wedding-cake Monument to Victor Emmanuel, and to reach it you have to take two elevators and, unless you have a bloodhound's sense of direction, wander around the eerie, echoing inner corridors and stairways of the monument itself. At one point you have to go outdoors and walk around the back of the monument, while the stark facade of the Aracoeli church looms unfamiliarly close.

The staff of the Library and Archive, headed by the distinguished

Italian historian A. M. Ghisalberti, is uniformly courteous, and if you show even a polite interest in Italian history, all doors open to you. They will show you the vast collection of documents–including letters of Mazzini and Garibaldi–and, after some gentle insistence, they will open the store-rooms where the museum's collection is kept: stacks of battle-flags and boxes of relics (including a boot of Garibaldi's with a bullet-hole from the fighting at Aspromonte).

The Risorgimento collection documents the activity of *l'Italia laica,* the current of Italian thought that has opposed the temporal power of the Church. The vast extent of the Church's activity and influence is, in turn, illustrated–or rather, implied–in the huge, sprawling collection known as the Museo Missionario-Etnologico, which covers two floors of the Lateran Palace, next door to the basilica of San Giovanni.

Its 'ethnological' title might lead the wary tourist to suspect this of being a scientific museum; instead, nothing could be more delightfully hodge-podge. It is like a great rummage sale, consisting of anything and everything that pious ex-savages or souvenir-minded missionaries have sent from the outposts of civilization back to the Holy Father. The entrance to the galleries is guarded by a pair of splendid and frightening enamelled bronze Chinese dragons, and the rooms–labeled by country (China, India, Borneo, the Solomons, etc.)–contain a gorgeous mish-mash of rare objects, such as a Han vase or a Sung bronze, in the same cases with the worst, bargain-basement junk: teak cigaret-boxes and brass tea-trays–the sort of thing Army wives have been bringing back from the Orient since Admiral Peary opened up Japan. Particularly impressive are the primitive masks and shields from Polynesia and the Pacific islands.

At the same time, many of the objects demonstrate the sea-change undergone by Catholicism (or its official art, at any rate) in exotic climes. In the center of one hall there is a stone statue of the Sacred Heart, flanked by two angels: all of them are decidedly Javanese of feature and, at first glance, embarassingly similar to heathen idols. Just as, in another room, there is a suspiciously Oriental-looking statue of a man who turns out to the Belgian Father Marcel Sterkendried, of whom it is stated; 'when he had saved 30,000 Tartars from execution, they (1911-12) were converted en masse and with the metal of their idols erected this statue of their benefactor'.

There are many ingenious carvings of genre scenes, and in one cabinet labeled 'Agriculture and Cattle-raising', there is a group showing two men lying on a broad, low, wooden bunk, smoking long pipes of what I doubt was Half-and-Half. There is also an alabaster model of the Taj Mahal; and from New Britain, a black-skinned Madonna with flaming red hair.

Paul Valéry once remarked that, while he knew many great museums, he knew of no charming ones. Either he had a very private definition of *charmant,* or else he would have to eat his words in Rome, especially in one of the most charming museums of all: the Museo Napoleonico. This museum is calculated to appeal to busybodies, to those who are tempted to read other people's letters, who love faded photographs and crammed closets of out-moded clothes. The collection was made by Count Giuseppe Primoli, a descendant of the Roman branch of the Bonapartes, a favorite nephew of Napoleon III and Eugenie. At his death, in 1927, the collection was catalogued and turned into a museum in his house, Palazzo Primoli, which he left to the city of Rome for this purpose.

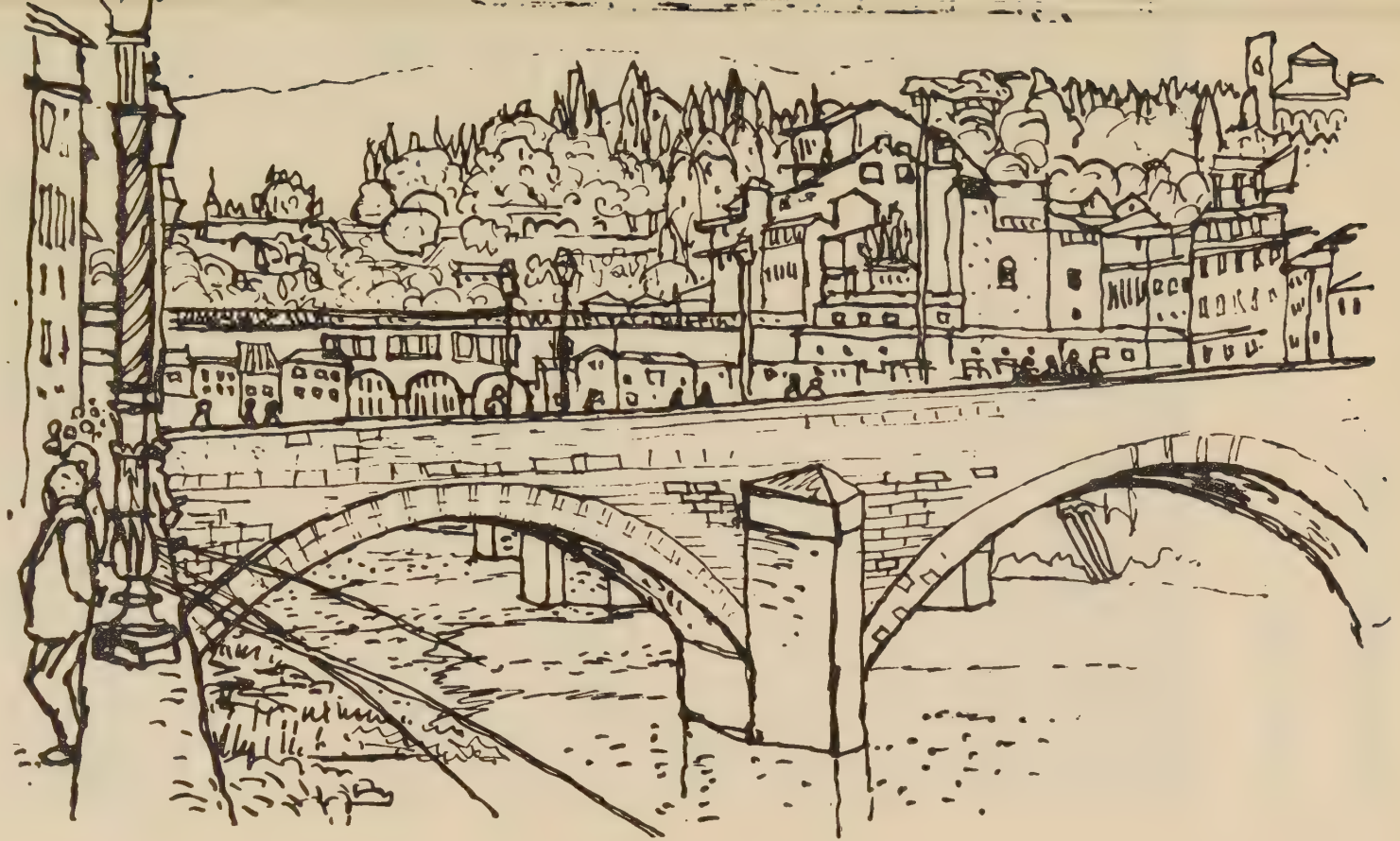
It is the museumophile's ideal. There is never anybody there. The two guards sit by the entrance, discussing football in a polite undertone, while you are free to wander through the rooms of the ground floor, looking at the cabinet photographs of long-forgotten princesses, all effusively inscribed 'A mon cher Primoli'. It is easy to imagine them lined up under a Spanish shawl on a Bechstein or a Pleyel. The cabinets also contain souvenir tobacco-boxes, jewelled swords, faded battle orders. Portraits of major and minor Bonapartes by court painters–and by Winterhalter and Canova–line the walls. There are photographs of Eugenie as a dumpy old lady receiving English soldiers during World War I in her villa in Chislehurst; somehow these come as a shock–one never imagined Eugenie old. There are proclamations, and in a little square glass box, the plaster cast of Pauline Bonaparte's breast, taken by Canova in preparation for his statue of her as Venus, now in the Galleria Borghese. In one hall, there are even some pictures painted by members of the Bonaparte family–their talents lay elsewhere, evidently.

The museums mentioned above are among Rome's most interesting, but they are far from being the only interesting ones, and the leisurely tourist can find many more that repay a visit. In the church of San

Giovanni Decollato there is the *Camera storica,* which you can see if you ring the bell and are firm with the monk who answers it. A small room contains various memorabilia of the *Confraternita della Misericordia,* an order of clergy and laymen (Michelangelo was a member), who were charged with assisting condemned criminals to the block and burying their bodies afterwards. Two macabre cases hold black chalices and robes, the black chest into which heads fell, and the black stretcher on which the bodies were composed afterwards.

The Museo Ferroviario in the basement of the big new railroad station exhibits models of old and new trains, stations, bridges, and the Messina ferry, along with beautiful old tram tickets (decorated with pictures of Sarah Bernhardt and other stars) and photographs, including one of Pius IX imparting his blessing to kneeling station-masters and switchmen from the very train preserved in Palazzo Braschi. The Colonial Museum has souvenirs of Italy's unfortunate African ventures, and the tickets are sold by a sad-looking Abyssinian, whom one feels might almost be tagged and catalogued along with the elephant tusks and the woven baskets. The Copernican Museum (in the Observatory on Monte Mario) is difficult to get into–signs everywhere say 'No Admittance' and the gardener is crusty–but contains a great collection of ancient astrolabes and primitive astronomical instruments.

And still, these are not all. I hear, from time to time, rumors of other museums as yet undiscovered. A friend of mine insists that in Rome there is a 'Purgatory Museum', with footprints and other evidences left by the dead who have briefly revisited the earth. But nobody seems to know where this museum is. I'm keeping my eyes open. One of these days I'll be strolling in some remote part of the city, and a worn, marble plaque will catch my attention. It's happened to me before: the museum-lover's luck.



The Ponte Vecchio by Harry Moore-Gordon

The Gumbo Cult

by Eugene Walter

I have always regarded gumbo as a special, indeed a ritual, dish, and since it is symbolic in my mind of my beloved Mobile, that silliest of towns on the Gulf Coast, I have always tended the gumbo cult, no matter where I've found myself.

Two snapshots will suffice to explain a little of my affection for my native city, first capital of the Louisiane, and port for the state of Alabama. Think about the carnival for an instant. Each *tableau roulant* takes a year to prepare: wooden substructure, chicken wire, papier mâché, paint, gold leaf. Maskers climb aboard in their satin costumes, the torchbearers line up on either side with their Roman fire and kerosene lamps, the mules in their white sheetings are harnessed and the floats lumber slowly through the town, each preceded by a band and a mounted marshall, tailed by gangs of little boys waving the burnt-down stumps of flares. The procession lasts perhaps two hours: a year to prepare then one brief and gorgeous apparition. The next day, it will be dismantled and next year's parade begun.

Second snapshot: once when a hurricane was due to hit Mobile (we have a big one every year that has a six in it: 1896, 1906, 1916, etc.). I drove about town with a musician named Catherine Ann Brahms-Middleton to see the boardings going up on shop windows, sandbags piled up, all that. In the middle of the downtown area is Bienville Square, named for one of the d'Iberville brothers who founded Mobile in the 1690's, and which has beds of azaleas and camellias under the oak trees. With a sky ominously ink-blue, and a rising wind, storm warnings flying in the port, here was a gardener with his hose, quietly watering the flowering shrubs, snipping off dead flowers and seemingly oblivious to the coming storm. See what I mean?

* * *

My grandmother was a tiny woman, somewhat *boulotte,* passionately interested in flowers. I really remember little about her, save her clanking amethyst beads and that she smelt good, a kind of lemon verbena smell. It was in her kitchen that I first saw gumbo prepared, at her table that I first ate it, and joined the gumbo cult for life. At that time there were still a few Indians living in the woods around Mobile, remnants

and revenants of those Five Civilized Tribes which had been moved west by the unfortunate action of the U.S. government. They were not at all redskins, but rather I would call them beige-skins, for they were pale crême-caramel in colour. A few old women, among these Indians, were boboshillies, and came to town once or twice a week with their herbs, barks, and remedies. The boboshilly who came to my grandmother was tall and thin, and wore a white muslin headcloth, almost like a turban. She was completely noiseless as she came and went with a market basket full of this and that: I remember bay leaves, bird's-eye pepper, and the important gumbo filé.

This filé is a preparation of dried ground sassafras leaves which have been pounded in a mortar, sifted through a hair sieve, and bottled. It is a thickening agent, and is used in many Southern variants of gumbo, jambalaya, etc. It is always added just before serving and is never (I said never, yes, I repeat, *never*) cooked. It is the ingredient usually missing in these dishes when they are prepared away from the South. Okra, another Southern speciality, is often used to impart to gumbos that special smoothness which is a kind of figured-bass accompaniment to the piquant spices employed. Okra is the seed-pod of a plant belonging to the mallow or hibiscus family: the rose-madder and marshmallow are its cousins. Sassafras is native, but okra came from the Sierra Leone, brought by slaves. Sometimes, to confuse things, the okra is called 'gumbo' (or 'gumbo plant') – both are African words. 'Gumbo' means 'everything together' and for example 'gumbo ya-ya' means 'everybody talking at once'. The most subtle gumbos employ both okra and filé. I think I need not add that these dishes rich in seafood and spices are both aphrodisiac and restorative. *Pourquoi pas?*

I remember one occasion when a grand or state gumbo was being prepared in my grandmother's kitchen. The boboshilly had come and gone, and my grandmother and two negro servants were busy washing and chopping and boiling. One was Rebecca who had been my father's nurse; the other was Estelle who was mine. It was a cloudy day, and at a given moment when thunder crashed and a downpour began, the yard man Edward came inside to sit in the corner by the stove and have a cup of coffee. Edward was a light brown, and very religious. In imitation of Old Testament prophets he wore long hair and a curly silken beard. I think his origins were either East African or Copt. I had

been given the task of picking pecans for pie and was sitting under the kitchen table, using a wooden box to work on.

Father Sidell from St. Joseph's church was coming to dinner, and this gumbo was to contain crab, shrimp, chicken. The crabs were banging about in a box under the sink, the lid held down by a brick.

Suddenly there was a huge crash of thunder, a blinding yellow-green light, and then a rose-coloured globe of fire rolled through the room. Lightning had struck the pecan tree growing in the back yard by the stable. Rebecca screamed, Estelle crossed herself, my Grandmother looked under the table and said, 'Are you there, humbug?' But then everybody began to laugh madly, and since I couldn't see what they were laughing about, I crawled out and stood up. The electricity had caused Edward's hair and beard to puff out in the most extraordinary way. His head had become an enormous puffball, like a human dandelion puff. He was quite confused and spluttering. The funny thing was, he couldn't make his hair and beard go down, they stayed puffed out the rest of the day. I had been afraid of Edward before this episode; afterward we became friends. He had saved tinfoil for seven years, and one day, on his way to the Marine Junk Company to sell this hoard, he brought it by on a coaster wagon. He had made a huge globe of it, about two feet in the axis. I can still see him pulling it down Conti Street, like somebody delivering a silver roc egg.

This is my Grandmother's state gumbo: first boil the shrimp.

CHEVRETTES BOUILLIES, *the real way*

50 fine shrimp, at least.
1 big bunch of celery, or 2 small
Few sprigs of thyme and parsley
2 bay leaves, torn in half
1 dozen allspice
1 blade of mace
6 cloves
1 red pepper pod (opened and seeds thrown away)
Dash cayenne
3 black peppercorns, cracked.
Scraped lemon peel, a little.
Salt.

Use a large pot of water, put lots of salt. Chop up the celery and celery leaves, crack or break all the spices, throw all in. When the water has boiled a few minutes so as to take the flavor of the spices, throw in the shrimp and boil for ten minutes. Then set them aside to cool in this water. When cool, shell them. This is the only way. They come out tender and perfect. But they must cool in this water. Save the water.

Second step, boil the crabs. You'll want six or eight big ones; put them first into cold water, this cleans and kills them. Then plunge them into seasoned boiling water. When they are cool, pick them. Leave the claws intact however: each serving of this gumbo should have a good crab claw in it. Now the dish itself:

GUMBO OF CHEVRETTES AND CRABS

Medium-sized chicken, cut in pieces.
2 or 3 slices ham.
3 green peppers
2 stalks of celery
3 tomatoes
4 onions
2 cloves of garlic
Spices and aromatics
Butter or bacon drippings
2 quarts of stock.
Can tomato paste
Okra

Take two tablespoons of butter or bacon fat, melt it in an iron skillet, add two tablespoons of flour and make a roux. Roux is the basis of practically all Créole dishes. This is to give the gumbo a good colour. Stir the flour in the fat (always with a wooden spoon) until without any idea of burning it has achieved a rich dark brown. Add a small can of tomato paste and a cup of boiling water, stir well. Add bay leaves, thyme, tabasco, cayenne, cracked peppercorns, etc. Now transfer this mixture to a large deep pot and put to simmer, adding two quarts of stock or strained shrimp water, chopped peppers, celery, ham, tomatos, etc. Put butter and finely-chopped garlic in skillet, then brown chicken and onions together. Throw in some stock and scrape up chicken drippings, add all this to main pot. Add okra after this has simmered an hour. Let

simmer another hour. Add salt to taste. Shortly before serving, put in shrimp, crab meat and crab claws, mix well. Five minutes before actually dishing up the gumbo, take a cup of liquid from the pot, add a tablespoon of gumbo filé, mix well and stir into pot. Served with boiled rice and hot buttered French bread. Serves about a dozen hungry people or maybe sixteen polite ones.

Well that gives you an idea, doesn't it? People are always asking me, what is gumbo? As you see, it's not a soup exactly, it's not a stew, not a ragoût, it's a – gumbo! It is as dark and as thick as river mud, unctuous, spicy, and satisfying.

Thackeray, when he came to New Orleans, decided he liked gumbo even better than the *bouillabaisse* he had hymned. Lafcadio Hearn, one of the more interesting 19th century exotics, who was born of mixed European parentage on a Greek island, lived long in New Orleans, though settling at last in Japan. He compiled a book of Créole recettes which appeared anonymously from the offices of *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*. He reported dozens of variants, among them:

SIMPLE OKRA GOMBO,

which reminds me, that although gumbo is now the universal spelling, old family manuscript cookbooks in the South spell it gombaud, goumbaud, goumbo, etc., and one excellent cook but poor speller living near Vicksburg and its memories of the War, has jotted down in my notebook her formula for 'Shrimp gunboat'. Well, as I was saying,

SIMPLE OKRA GOMBO, *reported by Lafcadio Hearn*

'Chop a pound of beef and half a pound of veal brisket into squares an inch thick; slice three dozen okra pods, one onion, a pod of red pepper, and fry all together. When brown pour in half a gallon of water; add more as it boils away. Serve with rice as usual.'

MAIGRE OYSTER GOMBO, *reported by Lafcadio Hearn*

'Take 100 oysters with their juice, and one large onion; slice the onion into hot lard and fry it brown, adding when brown a tablespoon of flour and red pepper. When thick enough pour in the oysters. Boil together twenty minutes. Stir in a large spoonful of butter and one or two tablespoons of filée, then take the soup from the fire and serve with rice.'

Caution, honey, with that red pepper! He means a tablespoon of flour to which has been added a pinch of Cayenne. Here's a variant which I ate in Baldwin County in 1938. We had been to see the hermit who had built himself a large earthen dome. He was a follower of Tolstoy, and had ideas on vegetarianism, fireless cooking, and such. He was surrounded by sleek cats and copies of Parker's pamphlet, *Keep Close to the Ground.*

GUMBO Z'ÈBES FO' SPRAINGTIME
(GOMBAUD AUX HERBES, *as a spring tonic*)

Boil up the bones and scraps of a chicken and make a fine broth; strain, put back on the fire and throw in: 2 stalks of celery chopped fine, leaves and all, bunch of parsley chopped fine, two bunches of turnip greens chopped; bunch of spinach chopped, bunch of mustard greens chopped; some cracked peppercorns, salt to taste, good dash of Tabasco. Let simmer two or three hours and serve with plain boiled rice.

★ ★ ★

The Aleutian Islands, of which the Andreanof Islands are a part, are quite grand and nutty. Nobody knows how many thousands of islands and islets make up this chain, since this is the part of the globe which is geologically the youngest, bearing out the contention that the moon was born of the Pacific Ocean. Earthquakes are daily, and some of these islands have the habit of sinking into the sea for unpredictable periods, then rising just as nonchalantly. There are no trees, only the thick wind-flattened tundra grass, which springs anew in May and June, dies down in September and never really decays, only adds another layer of squashy matted mess, out of which new stalks rise when the winter snow is melted. Spring lasts a week and consists of blankets of cream-coloured anemones everywhere.

It is without doubt the saddest landscape on earth, shrouded in fogs and snow. The wind called williwaw really does blow horizontally from the North Pole and one can lean into it, until one is walking almost horizontally. Since I came from Alabama and had never seen snow in my life, I was bewitched. But many of the soldiers found the absence of trees depressing. Some of them made a tree of wood, chicken wire, and burlap, and put a little fence around it, and a sign: *Aleutian National*

Forest. When the bulldozers were pushing earth and rock and ice to make an emergency landing strip on the island of Atka I realized with a jolt that it was All Too Much to Bear, quite odd. The mounds piled up by the bulldozer had grotesque shapes which seemed yearning to change into faces and figures. All these islands and their landscapes seemed stirring in their sleep. I always thought of the rock peak Tchelitchew designed for the ballet of *Apollon Musagète*: at the end, in the calm light, it is seen as the heroic head of a sleeping Apollo. But there was no calm light here: the sun showed itself, and then fitfully, only five times in the three years I spent in those islands. The ravens seemed always hovering on the brink of human speech, too. I fancied astonishing exchanges between them. Without effort the birds around the dugout where I worked had learned to say, 'Hello!' and 'Hi, Doc!' and 'F–you!' It is easy to understand how, as I strolled furred and booted along the black Bering sands with a pet caribou and two dogs, the ravens crying greetings and obscenities through the thickly-swirling snow, I might long for the reassurance of a good spicy gumbo and the conviviality it implies.

So I learned to cook in those islands, since the food in the Air Force mess was mostly inedible. By dint of much stealing, bargaining (an old *New Yorker* was worth two fresh eggs in the Navy area), and scrounging of various sorts, along with the providential appearance of occasional food packages from the States, I was able to supply, for my cronies sybarite like me, one or two interesting suppers a week. I had a friend who was a pilot making a regular run down the Aleutian chain, and he brought gin, Guerlain soap and other things I require to exist. I kept begging him to bring a can of okra, but he could never find it. I was longing to try a gumbo. I remember well the night he turned up with it. The snow was deep and the williwaw blowing. The runway had been cleared and I waited by the hangar with dogs and caribou. My friend when he arrived was frozen but smiling.

'You and your okra,' he said. 'You know what it's really called? Lady-fingers!'

But he had found a tin of it at Edmonton in the Alberta province of Canada. Well I never heard it called lady fingers before or since, lady-fingers in the South are a kind of spongy tea-cake in the shape that the French call *langues-de-chat,* but that's another history of *Charlotte russe*

and such. Anyway, the next day, caribou and dogs and I went to dig clams on the black shores of the Bering, and I made a gumbo of fresh clams, dried onion flakes, tomato paste, celery salt, lemon peel and the blessed okra alias lady fingers. It was somewhat ersatz; but we really enjoyed it.

* * *

One winter day in New York after the war, I felt a persistent, mystical, and not-to-be-denied hunger for a big bowl of gumbo. Now it's interesting that in New York one can find food of every country on earth, save the South. What is advertised as Southern fried chicken is usually an ancient fowl encased in a cement mixture and tormented in hot grease for a week. Biscuits à la New York are pure cannon wadding. Gumbo they've not even heard of. I lived on Ninth Street in the summer, because of a little garden back of the apartment, but when the steam heat turned on in October I always moved uptown to an unheated flat on Tenth Street for the winter. I hate steam heat; makes me think I have a brick on my head. It keeps me awake at night and I hear the spines of old leather books cracking open in the nasty smothery heat. *Crack*! There's Ovid. *Snap*! Oh, poor Beddoes! *Creak*! *Pop*! Alas, the little two-volume Herrick.

Later the composer Donald Ashwander from Alabama came to live in the same building on Tenth Street, and made his excellent corn bread – best baked in an iron skillet – but then I was quite alone in my nostalgia for Southern dishes. So I went over to the Bleecker Street market to look for okra and got nowhere. Later, on Third Avenue, while shopping for paprika bacon, I saw garlands of tiny okra festooning the window of a food shop run by an Armenian.

'I want some okra,' I began, but that wasn't the name he knew. When I pointed, he said, 'Oh, those are called Greek peppers.'

'But they're neither Greek nor peppers,' I protested, adding to myself, 'just like the Harmonious Blacksmith is neither harmonious nor blacksmith, like the City Center is neither city nor center, the Republican Party is neither republican nor party, and red sable brushes are made of squirrels' tails.' But I took home a garland of the precious pods, which had been strung on cotton thread and dried in the sun, and made a nice

CHICKEN-GUMBO

1 medium chicken, in pieces
1 chorizo, or any small hot sausage
2 slices ham
2 large onions
2 bunches celery
1 green pepper
1 pound okra
1 big can tomatoes
2 tablespoons bacon fat
Parsley
2 bay leaves, torn
Tabasco, cracked peppercorns, cayenne.
2 1/2 quarts of broth or stock.

Clean and cut up chicken as for fricassee; dice ham and sausage; coarsely chop up onions, pepper, celery, parsley, okra. Melt shortening in a deep pan and cook chicken and ham and sausage to a golden brown, add onion, pepper, etc. and cook them also until browned. Put in tomatoes, bay leaf, cover and simmer for half an hour. Add stock, cover closely and simmer (never boil) about an hour and a half longer. Season highly and serve with rice.

* * *

When I went to live in Paris I went temporarily upon arriving to the Hôtel Helvétia in the rue de Tournon. It was run by a couple, M. et Mme. Jordan, he from the Jura, she Provençale. The woodwork in the entry hall was painted exactly the same colour as their yellow cat Nounouche who was perfectly camouflaged when he sat on the radiator. Since I never found anything resembling an apartment, I stayed on five years in the Helvétia, which was not without its charms, being a remodeled 18th century *hôtel particulier* kept well scrubbed and polished by the Jordans. The problem was in cooking, which was forbidden in the rooms. There was a marble-topped commode in my room and in it I hid a two-burner alcohol stove, pots and pans, tableware, etc. The iron

screen of an unused fireplace concealed my modest cellar. So rather elaborate dinner parties took place in a room not much larger than a refrigerator crate: each guest had to take away afterwards a neatly packaged bit of garbage, to prevent my culinary activities from being discovered, and to prevent mice. One Italian princess, unused to such procedures, managed to leave a trail of coffee grounds and langoustine shells from my third floor room to the street, but usually all went well and what with the Riesling cooled in an ice-filled bidet, and candles burning in ormolu-and-crystal candelabra, a small oasis was created against the dire Paris climate. The most memorable dinners centered around a chicken cooked in *vin jaune de Jura* for Jack and Gurney Campbell, a soup of leeks and langoustine for the Pakistani actress Roshann Dhunjibhoy and the Dutch photographer Otto van Noppen, and shrimp in a fondue sauce for a Finnish darling named Renata Vitzthum von Eckstädt. I'll tell you about all these plates another time. What I'm getting at, is that at a given moment gumbo was indicated, since I had three serious eaters coming to dinner: Sally Higginson, Theodora Keogh and Celestino Mendès-Sargo, all of whom had heard just about enough on the subject of gumbo and demanded to taste it. As usual, the quest for okra began. I hopped onto the 84 and rushed to Hédiard's, back of the Madeleine.

'Okra?' demanded the fat pink clerk in white apron. *'Qu'est-ce que, vous voulez dire?'* He proffered mangoes and loukoumia, but the magic pods were unknown to him. My gumbo dinner might never have taken place if I had not dined in a Greek restaurant with some African friends: the first plate we attacked was a mound of okra.

'Comment s'appelle ce plat exquis?' I asked cautiously.

'Ça? Mais, ce sont les bamias.'

'Ah, oui, bamias,' I replied knowingly. But I sought out the head chef to learn his source of supply. He confided that there was a grocery in the rue Hautefeuille with enormous supplies of tinned okra, or bamias. Next day, armed with string-bag and hope, I set out for the rue Hautefeuille, a narrow, short street off the Boulevard St. Germain. I entered a low dark *épicérie,* presided over by a child-murderer type and his vampire mother.

'Bamias,' I mumbled, receiving an uncomprehending glare in return. French politeness, you know.

'Ainh?' said Ma.

'Bamias,' I repeated, but then I saw them, rows of fat tins with baroque lithographs of the okra plant. I pointed an adamant, triumphant forefinger.

'Ça?' squeaked Ma.

'Mais,' glowered the child-murderer, *'ce sont les cornes grecques.'*

'That which we call a rose . . .' I muttered, and gave my order. Anyway, I had my okra and made for Sally, Theodora, and Celestino a

GUMBO, IMPROVISÉ, *dit* DE PARIS

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
4 medium sized leeks
About a pound of shrimp
2 or 3 dozen mussels
Stalk of celery
Parsley
Thyme
8 langoustines
Bay leaf, cayenne, peppercorns, tabasco
4 tomatoes, quartered
1 large tin okra.

Melt butter in casserole. When it starts to brown, add chopped leeks. Then stir in flour. Add parsley, thyme, chopped celery, etc. Cook for a minute. Add liquid from mussels (which have been scrubbed and opened) and about a quart and a splash of water. Add raw shrimp, langoustines, seasongings, salt to taste. Cover and simmer very gently for an hour and a half. Add okra. Add mussels and cook till they curl around edges. Remove from fire and add a nut of butter and dash of tabasco. Serve with plain boiled rice, French bread, dry white wine chilled. Follow with a garlicky green salad, fruit, coffee, and Cointreau.

* * *

When I moved to Rome to live in a tiny house with a pocket-handkerchief of terrace and garden at the top of 157 steps on a hillside, I

immediately had okra seeds fetched from America and lovingly tended the green seedlings in the center of a flower bed until a helpful gardener took them for weeds and snatched them out. I gave seeds to Italian farmers at Latina on the Pontine plain, and the plants flourished and bore but they picked the pods only when they were longer than the regulation inch-and-a-half, with the result that when cooked this okra had the texture and flavor of boiled tree-trunks. Italians are very suspicious of new dishes and tend to sabotage them. But down in Calabria, in the neighbourhood of what once was Sybaris, the okra is cultivated and employed in many a savoury country mess. They're called Greek peppers there. The okra is a staple of diet in Greece, under its name of bamia: it has other names African, Turkish, and Slavic, which I've not yet learned. But okra or lady-finger or bamia or Greek horn or Greek pepper or witch's finger or gumbo or African mallow or what you will, it's a delightful vegetable and will survive the conspiracy to consign it to oblivion: I've just searched the Oxford and the Larousse and find nothing under any of its names. Now it occurs to me that I have mentioned okra only in connection with gumbo: it has a fame and career in its own right. *If you have a little water boiling in a pot, with a bit of scraped lemon peel, 2 or 3 cracked peppercorns, and a pinch of sugar, you can toss in a peck or so of okra, cook about five minutes or until they are succulent and just right, then drain, salt, butter, and serve. One picks up each pod by the stem, eats all save this stem. Very fine. Here is Bugeye's famous dish:*

FRIED OKRA WITH GREEN TOMATO

Chop up about a pound and a half of okra, and one or two good-sized green tomatoes. Shake them all together with salt, pepper, half a cup of corn meal, in a paper bag. Fry slowly in three tablespoons of bacon fat until brown. Drain on absorbent paper and serve.

Even as I write this, Southern agents are planting okra in fields close to Paris and seedlings begun in a glass-house are just being set out in the fields of Worcestershire. Beverley Pepper has *thickets* of it near Rome, and the Burpee Seed Company now offers a variety called Louisiana Velvet which can be started outdoors in Maine in even the coldest Spring . . . So the gumbo may become international, since it's a pure

pleasure as well as being aphrodisiac and restorative. Best of all, it's a dish that must be lingered over, and we all know that the dinner-table is the sunburst from which ideas go orbiting.

Now a note, to show that gumbo is not just a New World upstart, but has classical antecedents. All round the Mediterranean there are local variants of the mixed dish of seafood and spices cooked dry or left soupy, served with or without rice. The *bouillabaisse Marseillaise,* the *paella,* the *risotto con gamberi,* the *pilaff,* the *zuppa di pesce* are cousins germane to the gumbo and all own common ancestors in the ancient Roman kitchen. If you look in the first-century *Art of Cooking* by Apicius, which survives with later fourth or fifth-century interpolations, you'll find Book IV devoted to dishes of many and mixed ingredients, including a section on *patinae iscium holerum pomorum* and one on *minutal de piscibus velesiciis.* The *patinam Apicianam sic facies* is nothing but a recette for gumbo with oil-cakes instead of rice as accompanient. The tradition of the spiced mixed dish comes to the Caribbean from the southern side of the Mediterranean with the slaves, from the northern shores of that Sea with colonists from Spain and France. Chicken, crustaceans, onion, bay laurel, pepper and okra are the basic ingredients. The ancient Romans made a kind of Worcestershire sauce called *liquamen* prepared from salted sun-dried fish steeped with wine and spices in an open jar for two or three months. In the Créole gumbo the method of preparation and the combinations of elements provide the luscious aromatic not-too-salty flavor which is so satisfying.

The Greeks prepare excellent tinned okra which is available in any fancy food store; so do the Americans. There are good shrimp canned by both the Japanese and the Sicilians. Tabasco comes from New Iberia, Louisiana and is found everywhere. Gumbo filé is a real problem: if you can't beg some off a Southern friend, why not send a postcard to the Chamber of Commerce in New Orleans? There's no excuse for lacking gumbo if you belong to the cult or even think you'd like to. An appetite for this dish has the quality described by M. de Saint-Just in the *Almanach des Gourmands* of 1807:

> *C'est un plaisir; c'est le dernier qu'on quitte.*
> *Est-il éteint? bientôt il résusscite.*

And that's the truth of the matter.

The crow in the woods

by John Updike

All the warm night the secret snow fell so adhesively that every twig in the woods about their little rented house supported a tall slice of white, an upward projection which in the shadowless glow of early morning lifted depth from the scene, made it seem Chinese, calligraphic, a stiff tapestry hung from the gray sky, a shield of lace interwoven with black thread. Jack wondered if he had ever seen anything so beautiful before. The snow had stopped. As if it had been a function of his sleep.

He was standing in his bathrobe by the window at dawn because last evening, amid an intricate and antique luxury, he and his wife had dined with their landlords. Two wines, red and darker red, had come with the dinner. Candles on the long table. Two other couples, older, subtly ravaged. Conversation as hollow and gay as Christmas balls. Dinner over, the men and women separated and then, the men's throats rasped by brandy and cigars, rejoined in a large room whose walls were, astoundingly, green silk. The mixed sexes chattered immersed in an incoherent brilliance like chandelier facets clashing. And at the end (the clock on the gray marble mantel stating the precipitate hour with golden hands whose threadlike fineness seemed itself an exquisitely pointed tact) in a final and desperate-feeling flight all swooped up the curving stairs and by invitation into the chamber where in daytime hours the white-haired hostess conducted her marvellous hobby of *cartinage*. She had fashioned a pagoda of cut colored papers. On the walls there were paper bouquets of flowers framed. On the worktable the most immense, the most triumphantly glossy and nozzled bottle of Elmer's Glue Jack had ever seen; he had never dreamed such a size could exist. The blue bull impressed on the bottle jubilantly laughed. Servants came and wrapped their coats around them. On the front porch the departing guests discovered at midnight a world thinly disguised in snow. The universal descent of snow restricted the area of their vision; outdoors had a domed intimacy. The guests carolled praise; the host, a short and old man, arthritic, preened: his dinner, his wine, his wife's *cartinage,* and now his snow. Looped, the young couple returned to the little rented house that even was his. They satisfied the sitter, dismissed her into the storm like a disgrace, and, late as it was, made love. So in a reflex of gratitude, when six hours later their baby cried, the man arose instead of his wife, and went to the child.

The soaked disper released an invisible cloud of ammonia that washed tears into his eyes. The whiteness edging the windows made decisive and cutting the light of the sun, burning behind the sky like a bulb in a paper lampshade. The child's room had become incandescent; the wallpaper, flowered with pale violets, glowed evenly, so that even the fluff-cluttered corners brimmed with purity.

The wordless girl, stripped and puzzled, studied the unusual figure of her father, out of season at this hour. The purple bathrobe's wool embrace and the cold pressure of the floor on his feet alike felt flattering; magnified him. His naked giant's thighs kept thrusting between the leaves of the bathrobe into the white air. He saw them, saw everything, through three polished sheets of glass: the memory of his drunkenness, his present insufficiency of sleep, and the infiltrating brilliance of the circumambient snow. As his impressions were sharp, so he was soft. The parallel floorcracks, the paint's salmon sheen, his daughter's somber and intent gaze like the gaze of a chemically distended pupil – these things, received through an instrument which fatigue had wiped clean of distractions, bit deeply into him and pressed, with an urgency not disagreeable, on his bowels.

Though the house was small, it had two bathrooms. He used the one attached to his daughter's room, where the square shower-curtain rod wobbled and tipped from the repeated weight of wet diapers. Around its bolted root the ceiling plaster had crumbed. He stood under a small shadow of amazement looking down at the oval of still water in which floated his several faeces like short rotten sticks, strangely burnished.

The toilet flushed; the whole illuminated interior of the little house seemed purged into action. He dressed his daughter's tumblesome body deftly and carried her to the stairs. The top landing gave on the door to his bedroom: he looked in and saw that his wife had changed position in the broadened bed. Her naked arms were flung out of the covers and rested, crooked, each to a pillow, like spotted ivory framing the cameo of her averted, maned skull. One breast, lifted by the twist of her shoulders, shallow in her sleep, was with its budded center exposed. The sun, probing the shredding sky, sent low through the woods and windowpanes a diluted filigree, finer than color, that spread across her and up the swarthy oak headboard a rhomboidal web. Like moths alighting on gauze, her blue eyes opened.

Discovered, the twigs of her sleep turning transparent, he hid by going downstairs. The child absent-mindedly patted the back of his neck as they descended the tricky narrow steps. These weak touches made his interior tremble as if with tentative sunshine. Downstairs was darker. The reflection of the snow was absorbed by the dank and porous furniture. Rented. Good morning, Mr. Thermostat. The milkman would be late today: chains slogging a tune on his stout tires: glory be. The childbearing arm of him ached.

He was unable to find the box of child's cereal. The cupboards brimmed with fine sugar and plastic spoons sprawling in polychrome fans. The catch of the tray of the high chair snagged; the girl's legs were hinged the wrong way. With multiplying motions of uncertainty he set water to heating in a cold-handled pan. Winter. Warm cereal. Where? The ceiling rumbled; the plumbing sang.

Came the wife and mother, came, wrapped in a blue cocoon that made her body shapeless, her face white. She had not been able to go back to sleep after he had left the bed. Proud, relieved, soft, he sat at the small pine table burnished with linseed oil. Gerber's wheat-dust came to smoke in the child's tray. Orange juice, slender as a crayon, was conjured before him. Like her sister the earth the woman puts forth easy flowers of abundance. As he lifted the glass to his lips he smelled her on his fingers.

And now released to return to his companion through the window, he again stared. The woods at their distance across the frosted lawn were a Chinese screen in which an immense alphabet of twigs lay hushed: a black robe crusted with white braid standing of its own stiffness. How beautiful, unstirring. There was no depth, the sky a pearl slab, the woods a fabric of vision in which vases, arches, and fountains were hushed.

His wife set before him a boiled egg smashed and running on a piece of toast on a pink plate chipped and gleaming on the oblique placemat of sunlight flecked with the windowpane's imperfections.

Something happened. Outdoors a huge black bird came flapping with a crow's laborious wingbeat. It banked and, tilted to fit its feet, fell toward the woods. His heart halted for the crow, with such recklessness assaulting an inviolable surface, seeking so blindly a niche for its strenuous bulk where there was no depth. It could not enter. Its black shape

shattering like an instant of flak, the crow plopped into a high branch and sent snow showering from a quadrant of lace. Its wings spread and settled. The vision destroyed, his heart overflowed. 'Clare!' he cried.

The woman's pragmatic blue eyes flicked from his face to the window where she saw only snow and rested on the forgotten food steaming between his hands. Her lips moved:

'Eat your egg.'

Till the right girls come along

William Goldman

The boy was crying.

The sound, agonized, high pitched, instantly filled all the rooms of the apartment. In a moment, the baby's wail joined it, ran parallel, higher pitched, more piercing.

Peter stopped lathering his face and closed the bathroom door. The sound came through. Peter turned both faucets on full, closed his eyes. He could still hear it. Trembling, he reached for a razor blade and, experimentally, brought it down to his wrist. A quick slash produced a small cut and he stared in an almost detached way at the rush of blood that suddenly broke through the gap in his skin. He placed his wrist under the faucet and temporarily washed the blood away. In a moment, it rushed out again and he removed some lather from his face, dabbed it on the cut. The white and red mixed on contact and as he stared, Peter realized the colors were almost pretty as they melded on his arm. Supressing a shudder, he began to shave, glancing occasionally at his wrist, watching the blood dry. Finished, he combed his hair, tucked a towel tightly around him, and left the bathroom. He was seated on the bed, putting on his socks, when Betty Jane came in.

'I don't know what can be wrong with Robby,' she said. 'He isn't sick. His forehead is as cool as ice.' Peter stared up at his wife's face, which even early in the morning resembled nothing so much as one of the myriad, nameless movie starlets who were forever

smiling out from tabloid pages–perfect, carefree, completely vacant.

'Is he upset again?' Peter asked.

'Didn't you hear him crying?'

'No. I was shaving. The faucets were on.What was he crying about?'

'He wouldn't tell me,' Betty Jane said. 'Something.'

Peter nodded and walked over to his dresser and started putting on a shirt. For a moment, he looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes, he noted, were puffier than usual. He rubbed them gently with the backs of his fingers.

'Don't you feel well?' Betty Jane asked him.

He nodded. 'Fine.'

'Are you sure? You were rubbing your eyes. Do you have a headache?'

Peter stared at her reflection in the mirror. 'You're very pretty,' he said.

She smiled. 'I must look a fright.'

'You never have. I don't think you could.' He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, coughing, placing it burning end out on the edge of the dresser.

'I don't like that cough,' Betty Jane said. 'Thank God for the vacation. We can all use it.'

'Yes,' Peter nodded.

'I'll pack this morning. Is there anything special you want me to bring?'

'No. Use your own judgment.'

'All right, then. I'll pack this morning and drive out early this afternoon. That way I'll miss the weekend traffic. What time will you get there?'

'As soon as I can. I haven't much to do. Probably by seven.'

'Do you want anything special for supper?'

'No.'

'Are you mad at me?'

'No.'

'You're acting as if you were mad at me.'

'I'm not. I promise.'

'You've been working too hard. You need the vacation more than any of us. A week of sunshine will fix us all up.' She paused. 'The sun

does shine on Long Island, doesn't it. Peter? It always seems so foggy.'

'Occasionally. At least once a week. It's in the charter.'

She hurried over and put her arms around him, holding him close. 'Is there something wrong, Peter? Is there?'

'Everything is fine,' he told her.

'Nothing can ever be wrong,' Betty Jane said. 'As long as we love each other. You said that. Do you remember when you said that?' He managed to say that he remembered . . .

'Seventeen and one-half minutes late,' Natty said to him as he walked past her desk. 'Breaking all previous records. Winner and still champion, Peter Bell.'

'They all looked like bugs this morning,' he answered, going into his office, dropping his briefcase onto his glass topped desk. 'Bugs scurrying down into their holes. I couldn't face it so I walked. Beautiful morning. Where's my coffee?' She pointed to the corner of her desk. He nodded. 'Any mail?'

'Lots.' Natty unfolded a letter. 'This one's a real doozie. From a Mrs. Bushmill, who claims friendship with your mother. And she's written a novel and she is sending it to you under separate cover and she wants us to publish it and for you to give it a particularly good word. It is entitled, I swear, "Falling Virgin," and there is a postscript in which she pledges that the book is in no way autobiographical.'

'Good old Mrs. Bushmill,' Peter said. 'Anything else?'

'The rest is on your desk. Unless you managed to knock it off.'

Peter stared at her. 'You look different. What is it?'

'You tell me.'

'Dress?'

'Right the very first time.' Smiling, she stood up and turned around. 'Do you like it? It's supposed to make my hips look slimmer. Do you think it makes my hips look slimmer?'

'Practically non-existent. Big date?'

'Very big.'

Peter nodded and started toward his office. 'You know,' he muttered over his shoulder. 'My wife is much prettier than you are.'

'How nice that must be for you.'

'Yes. Yes it is.' And then: 'I don't know why I said that. I'm sorry.'

He was not surprised when she did not reply.

Closing the door behind him, he sat rigidly in his chair and stared at the blank wall across the room. There were a number of cracks in the wall and if you let your imagination run free, the cracks looked like animals. There was a cow in the lower right hand corner near the floor. There was a rabbit in the upper right hand corner near the ceiling. Peter also found a donkey, a fish, a lion, and the upper half of a kangaroo. He enjoyed himself thoroughly and the morning went very quickly, except for a few minutes along toward eleven when he hurried down the corridor to the men's room and vomited twice in the toilet, flushing it carefully after he had finished.

He was working on the outline of an elephant which he had never noticed before when Natty came in. 'I'm going to lunch,' she told him. 'Can I bring you anything?'

'Is it that late?'

'Almost half past.'

'No, thanks. I'm going out myself in awhile. Have fun.'

A few minutes later, Peter stood up, put on his suitcoat, and left the office. Turning west at Fifty-fourth street, he walked quickly, his head down, his hands in his pockets. When he reached the Avenue of the Americas, he entered the corner bar, which was dark and empty, except for a quartet of workmen who were discussing the merits of some pornographic movies one of them had seen the night before. Sitting at the back corner table, Peter lit a cigarette while the waiter brought him a martini. He drank it quickly and signaled for another. In the space of ninety seconds, he glanced at his watch five times.

She came in then, standing a moment in the doorway, getting accustomed to the darkness. Then she walked over to him and sat down. They embraced silently.

'Natty, Natty, Natty,' Peter whispered. 'I thought you'd never come.'

'I'm sorry,' she began. 'But I got caught up . . .'

'I love you.'

'. . . . with one of the other secretaries . . .'

'I honest to God love you.'

'. . . and I couldn't get away.'

'Didn't you hear me?'

'Yes.'

'Well, say something.'

'I think it's nice.'

'Nice?'

'You want more?'

'I want more.'

'I love you too, Peter Bell.'

'There,' he said. 'That's nicer.'

The waiter brought the second martini and set it on the table. 'Would madam like something to eat?' he asked.

'Madam isn't hungry just now,' Natty said. She glanced at Peter. He shook his head. 'The gentleman is on a liquid diet,' she told the waiter. 'Doctor's orders. We're fine. Thank you.'

The waiter nodded, retreating. They sat quietly, close together. He knew without looking that she was watching his face, waiting for him to speak. Reaching out quickly for his martini, he gulped it down. She waited. He dabbed carefully at his mouth with his handkerchief, taking his time, hoping that she would say something. She did not. So finally, he had to say it.

'I didn't tell her,' he muttered. 'I couldn't tell her.'

Natty remained silent.

'I was going to,' Peter hurried on. 'I had the whole speech worked out in my mind. I even said I wanted to have a talk with her. But when she came in and kissed me and sat down beside me, looked up at me, smiling that goddam smile of hers – I couldn't tell her. I just couldn't. So you know what I did instead? I sat there. Most of the night. I just sat there most of the night figuring it all out.'

'Peter,' Natty whispered. 'Peter. You said you were going to tell her. Yesterday. You swore you were going to tell her last night. Have you forgotten already?'

'It's not that easy, Natty. Don't you see that? Don't you see? She hasn't done anything wrong. She's not a villain. All she thinks about is making me happy. 'Are you mad, Peter? Don't you feel well? Can I get you this, Peter? Can I get you that?' She can't help it if she doesn't think. She can't help it if she bores me. She didn't make me marry her, Natty. All she's done is love me, don't you see?'

Natty said nothing, but stared instead at the quartet of workmen, and

the waiter standing alongside them, listening. 'What do you think I've done?' she whispered finally, still staring at the workmen. 'What crime have I committed? Do you think I like playing this part, meeting in places like this? Do you think I like lying, always lying, and jumping every time the telephone rings?' She turned and looked at him. 'I love you, Peter. Not for your money; you aren't rich. And not for your beauty, because you're not beautiful. I just love you, and I want to marry you, and I'm tired.'

'You think I'm not? This morning Robby started to cry again. He's ready for the analyst right now. And he used to be such a placid kid. It's my fault. Kids are so goddam sensitive. He knows. Robby knows. It kills me to look at him.'

'I'm sorry.'

'It's too late to be sorry. It's time to do something about it. I'm ruining everything this way. I know that. But Jesus! What do I tell her? It's not her fault. She hasn't done anything wrong.'

'Maybe . . .' Natty began.

'I spent all last night thinking about it,' Peter went on. 'Tonight. We're going out to her mother's place for a week. Her mother's away. I'll tell her tonight. I've got it all figured. I'll tell her tonight and that way we'll have the week to work things out.'

'Maybe I should quit,' Natty said. 'Maybe I should try and find another job.'

'That wouldn't do any good. What good would that do? I'd just meet you again. Sometime. Someplace. Or somebody like you. That's the crazy part. I'll bet they're a million of us meeting you today. Lunch or supper or somewhere. You're a very popular girl. The girl we should have married. But we didn't. And even if we'd met you ten years ago, we still wouldn't have. You know why?'

'No, why?'

'Because your hips are too big. Do you understand that? Your goddam hips are too big.'

Natty said nothing.

'Do you know what I was doing ten years ago?' Peter went on, talking very quickly. He was staring at the edge of the round table in front of him, following it around and around, but he was talking very quickly. 'Do you know what I was waiting for? I was waiting for Her.

Capital H. The Girl. She was really going to be something. Beautiful. Just gorgeous. And bright. And kind and sweet and warm and under standing and I waited for her. Whenever I went to a party, the firthing I'd do was look around, because maybe this was the night. Maybe she'd be there, just waiting for me to come along. But she wasn't there. Never. Not once in all that time. And then, finally, all of a sudden, you realize something. That she doesn't exist. And worse, you realize that even if she did exist, she wouldn't want you. Because you look at yourself in the mirror and just for a second you see yourself. And right then you know that there's nothing special about you. So there you are. Out of college, working at some job, living in some simpy apartment. And you get lonely. You've never seen so many people before in your life; you party it up all the time, and still you're lonely. And that's when you make the big move.'

'Which is?'

'You decide to settle for less. So you go out and you meet some girl and you think to yourself, 'You know, she's not so bad.' And you're right. She isn't so bad. She's pretty as hell and she surprises you in bed and she can cook or she wants to learn and she's got 'mother' written all over her. And most important of all, she loves you. So you know what you do then?'

'Yes,' Natty said. 'You marry Betty Jane.'

'That's right. You marry Betty Jane. And it works out fine for awhile. Because she loves you so much. She thinks you're perfect and you never tell her differently. You make her love you more. Because it's nice being perfect. And pretty soon she's so wrapped up in you she's helpless. She's yours, all yours. And that's how things stand. Maybe forever if we're lucky. But usually we're not lucky. Usually we meet you.'

Natty reached out and took his hand. 'I can't . . .' She stopped abruptly and stared up at his face. 'When did that happen?' she said.

Peter glanced down at the thin red ridge of scar tissue on his wrist.

'When?' Natty repeated.

'This morning,' he muttered. 'When the boy started crying.'

'What did you think you were trying to prove?'

'Nothing. I wasn't trying to prove anything.'

She lifted his hand and pressed her lips against the scar. 'You won't do that again, now will you?'

'I won't do it again,' he promised.

She stood. 'I've got to be getting back. See you in a few minutes.'

'It's a lovely dress, Natty,' Peter said.

'Thank you.'

'And it does make your hips look slimmer.'

She nodded, turned to leave. He watched her as she walked to the door and out into the sunlit street. In the window over the door was a red neon sign. BAR. Backwards, it spelled RAB.

Peter stared at it awhile.

It was well after seven when he got out of the cab in front of his mother-in-law's house. Beyond, the bay moaned softly, and fog drifted in from the east. Peter paused a moment, breathing deeply. Then he walked into the foyer.

The note was lying on the foyer table. Somehow, he knew what it was before he picked it up, but he read it anyway. It was written in pencil, Betty Jane's writing, clean, clear, precise. 'Darling,' it began.

> Darling,
>
> I am writing this because something is the matter and I don't know what it is. But it doesn't matter what it is because I love you. Nothing matters except that and . . .

He read the rest of it quickly, pausing over the postscript at the bottom. 'ps. Robby and I had a long talk on the way out and he promises to try not to cry so much.' Peter read it again. '. . . he promises to try not to cry so much.' He was about to read it a third time but he had to stop.

At first he was surprised by the tears that so quickly blinded him. He tried to stop but he couldn't, so he leaned against the wall, his hands over his eyes, quietly sobbing. Then he began to gasp, short, ugly sounds, and he put his left hand into his mouth and bit down. He did not move until he felt Betty Jane's arms go around him and then he turned blindly and pressed his head against her neck. He clung to her a moment, listening as she whispered his name again and again. Finally, he pushed himself away and ran through the living room out to the porch, down the lawn to the bay.

The fog was cold and he slowed as he approached the water. Raising

his head, he looked around, trying to see, but the fog was too thick. He took a few steps into the bay. He walked until the water was up to his knees and his trousers clung tightly to his skin. Then he hesitated a moment, shivering. Finally he turned, walked back to shore. The turning back meant nothing; he had not changed his mind. But somehow, he did not want to drown in the darkness.

He crept up the beach to the house, his shoes making sucking sounds every step of the way . . .

It was light when he woke the next morning. Hurrying to the bathroom, Peter started to shave. He was about to apply lather when he looked at himself in the mirror. Shaking his head, he smiled, continued shaving, being careful not to cut himself. Then he put on his bathing suit and went downstairs.

Betty Jane and the children were in the kitchen when he got there. 'Going for a swim?' she asked.

He nodded.

'Take Robby with you. He's dying to get in the water.'

'No,' Peter heard himself saying. He was thinking, suddenly, that he had not left a note. Should he, he wondered? 'No,' he repeated. There was no reason to leave a note. There was nothing to say.

'Why not?'

'There's nothing to say.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean it's too cold for him out there this time of the morning.'

'Don't be silly,' Betty Jane said. 'It's as warm as toast already. You take him with you.'

'No,' Peter said, louder this time.

'Is something the matter?'

'Please,' he muttered. 'I can't take Robby. I'll come back for him in awhile. The beach. It's probably full of broken glass. I'll clean it up. Then I'll come back and we'll all go swimming.'

'All right,' Betty Jane nodded. 'First give us a kiss.'

Peter bent down, pressed his lips against her forehead. 'Remember,' he said. 'Don't go out there until I say so.'

He walked on. At the doorway, he turned momentarily and waved to them. A moment later, he was on the beach. It was a beautiful day. The

sun was strong and the sky, except for a few scattered clouds, was clear. The bay glistened in the morning light. He was glad he had waited.

The water was warm against his skin as he waded the first steps toward the horizon. He was glad of that too; he had never been a strong swimmer.When he stood chest high, he paused one final time and turned his head, staring at the shore. Then he began to swim.

He swam furiously, flailing at the water with his arms, kicking his feet with all his strength, his head down, eyes closed, holding his breath. It did not take long for the initial fatigue to set in, and he noted with relief that his arms already seemed heavy. Taking a breath, he ducked his head again and churned outward, away from shore. His eyes began to sting and smart so he pressed his lids tighter together, biting down with his teeth into his lower lip, making his breath last as long as he possibly could. The waves were higher the farther he went and they broke against him as he stopped again for air, the white foam darting into his mouth, clogging his nostrils. Treading water, he began to cough and spit, his eyes still closed. He sank under a moment but fought his way back to the surface only to be hit by another wave which threw him under again. His shoulders ached as he began swimming and his legs were so tired he no longer bothered to kick. Counting to himself, he forced his arms to swing around, carrying him farther and farther from shore. His throat felt completely dry and he swallowed several times, licking the roof of his mouth with his tongue. Again he sank under, swallowing water, coughing. Driving his legs into motion, he forced his way to the surface, his head back, gulping for air. Numbly, he realized he was crying and that his right leg was cramping, the calf muscle knotting painfully. Ducking under, he grabbed at the muscle and pounded at it with both fists. He was still holding onto his leg when he vomited. The spasms choked him and for a moment everything went white and his head began to grow until it dwarfed his body. Somehow he fought to the surface and lay still a moment. Barely able to move, he breathed one more time. Then, sideways, his body sank down. Something was holding tight to his knees and he tried to free himself but his hands got caught too, so all he could do was kneel and breathe and breathe and then he opened his eyes.

He was kneeling on a sandbar.

At first he was incapable of any reaction. His hands sank deeper into

the soft sand as he knelt there, the waves, gentler now, washing over him. Pushing down with his knees he raised his body and looked back at the shore. His eyes were swollen so that he could only see the faint outline of green trees beyond the beach. His ears were extraordinarily keen and he listened to the gulls shrieking high over his head. Then he heard another sound and he stared straight up at the vaguely blue sky, trying to figure it all out. In a moment, he recognized it as the sound of his own uncontrolled laughter.

Blindly, instinctively, he fell off the sandbar into deep water and tried to swim back. He had gone only a few strokes when he remembered his fatigue but it was too late. His leg cramped again and he screamed out loud but he did not bother to try to loosen the muscle. Again, everything went white and his head was growing, puffing up. His arms and legs were only tenticles now, waving in the water; he could not force them any more. His entire body was being split into sections. His head grew and grew and he vomited again and the pain in his leg seemed suddenly remote, not his. The whiteness increased until it blinded him with its brilliance and then, like a great switch flicked off, it vanished and darkness came.

He was aware when he first touched shore. He was aware of his legs dragging the pebbled sand but he made no effort to move until his face scraped bottom. Clawing at the sand, he dragged his body up until his face and chest were clear. Then he passed out again.

He was awakened by the slamming of the porch door and gradually he stirred, opened his eyes. Robby was running down the beach, Betty Jane walking behind. Peter managed to roll over and lock his hands around his knees, forcing himself up into a sitting position.

'Robby got tired of waiting,' Betty Jane called.

Peter nodded.

'I brought him out here. Play with him for awhile. I've got to go clean.'

'Yes,' Peter said.

'Robby,' Betty Jane called. 'Come play with daddy.' Waving, she turned and started back toward the house.

'What do you want to play?' Peter asked when she was gone.

Robby shook his head.

'We'll build sand castles,' Peter said. 'You'll like that.' He began

digging. He dug as hard as he could, concentrating on nothing at all but the yellow sand. Because if he didn't bother to think, it would be lunch time before he knew it. And lunch meant martinis. And after five or six martinis, he felt he could easily make it through the rest of the day.

Midnight to afternoon

by David Cornel De Jong

Before going to bed she had placed a full glass of water on the stainless top of the ebony chest. Beside it, into a small paper cup, she had dropped two brown capsules and one pink pill. She was asleep now in the dusk of the room created by the two-watt pilot light in the baseboard, which furthermore cast a somewhat meaningful twilight over the framed face of an Indian mystic, an avowed vegetarian. It was a cat's view.

The cat walked with unafraid but economic motions across the chest of drawers, sniffed at the pill and the capsules, and lapped daintily from the full glass of water. It leaped down to the floor with a minimum thud, meant to be noticed by the woman in the bed. It was time. When she began stirring with a rustle of annoyance, the cat jumped to the window sill and peered out into the night.

She was folding her covers aside. She was rising, gentling about in a white nightdress and worming her feet sleepily into a pair of red satin slippers. She reached for the water and the medicine gravely, but over her shoulder she said: 'Nice kitty. Nice,' before she sipped from the water first, almost as discreetly as the cat had done, to wash a sleep-taste away. Then she took the capsules and the pink pill and drained the glass.

Scuffling back to bed, she said once more, 'Nice, kitty,' and reminded herself dimly that she'd never had the fortitude to give her cat a name, not a male cat, not after three husbands had died on her. She knew too that she'd be awake now for a long time, and would be assessing her

three widowhoods. On the other hand, just before awaking there had been that dream, about three youths walking away, except that the middle one had had a man's back, and when he turned and grinned, a man's face. It didn't fit, because Robert had been the middle husband, and Robert didn't grin back across his shoulder even in memory.

As she stretched out in bed, Sam came first. He had been the first, a quiet but rough man with animals, a man with a lackadaisical core but guilelessly immediate demands. Or was that simply youth? 'He'd take your measure allright, kitty,' she whispered. Sam always came closest in the night, even if he had died twenty-five years ago of pneumonia. The way he had cried out during his delirium still made her shy of preachers, as if they could be perpetual witnesses. Actually she had not learned to appreciate Sam until he was at least three years dead. It was a cruel memory he exacted.

'Nice kitty.' she mumbled. 'Catch yourself a mouse. Make yourself useful at once, or else.' The cat didn't stir.

After those three years there had come Robert. Kindly do not call me Bob, don't Velma, he had pleaded on their wedding night. His plea had prophesied and summed up a great deal: a man like Robert died of worry. It had been her duty to torture him gently into compliance. Travel the smoke on, she reminded herself unhumorously now. She had been at it so gently, that he had lasted fourteen years. The death of their only child in infancy had broken him, because he had become so fulsomely the father that there had been no room left for motherliness.

There was still Arkwright to be disposed of before she could return to sleep, the pink pill notwithstanding. He had died two years ago. He had a nice monument over him, because he had expected and provided for a nice one. He had been the possessor of a lean body, prominent veins, narrow shins and bifocals. He had looked like an intellectual, but wasn't. On the other hand he had fulfilled a need that justified her memories of Sam. He had been a reflector.

'Damn you, kitty,' she mumbled, half asleep, but her damning was no longer a part of the real world.

The cat waited for her tentative little snores. Then it unflexed itself, moved noiselessly to the bureau top once more, sniffed at the empty paper cup, touched the rim of the glass with sensitive whiskers, but never looking at the woman in bed, went trotting down the stairs and

into the night, through the small trapdoor competently built by Arkwright for an earlier cat. He remembered Arkwright only as an odor lingering over the basement tool bench, even if the basement was now tidied up and spiderless and there were ecru curtains at all its windows.

In the gold-green morning with its zinc luster upon roofs, in the always loneliest morning of the year, she eased her one hundred and thirty pounds (you were so conscious of weight nowadays) down the stairs carrying a turquoise alarm clock to be synchronized, and called herself Velma, as in accusation, before she sat down to rest on the third step from the bottom. She listened to the June sounds which came through the open windows, and reminded herself to be happy that she had been born in June, a Gemini girl, expected to be volatile and hardly aware of her own worth. Which could still make Sam laugh and keep serious religion at bay.

Before she got up, she shook her red satin slippers off, in order to walk barefoot and perhaps votively across the fine rug Robert had given her to console himself after the death of their child. In the early morning she always walked across it on bare feet.

But in the middle of the deep blue rug, gaping up at her with two small chisel teeth, lay a rat. It was a young but very dead rat. 'Well, thank you, kitty,' she whispered, avoiding the naked tail with her toes.

'I'll take you away later,' she promised the rat.

There was also this about June mornings, once you had descended the stairs, they left you open like a book. There were robin shrills outdoors like punctuation marks. And she could see the crucified wistaria blossoms pining like saint's eyes, not quite suggesting: You could have done better, Velma. The room was suddenly populated with living accusations, fluttering against her. How many women, still firm of flesh were widows three times over? 'Kitty, kitty?' she asked with urgency, wishing it was a real name and a male name.

She knew she would get no answer. His eyes wouldn't be watching her. There would be no nearness now, no touching. The cat didn't like her in the early morning: her smells as of used cloth, old leaves, old skins. He would prefer birds screaming at him incessantly, and he'd swagger beneath them, importantly cat and untouchably male.

Nearing the kitchen, she ripped a lesson from the Daily Comfort Calendar. She left the leaflet on the old Boston Fern pedestal, to be read later. The fern had died with Sam. A tiny philodendron twined from a hand-painted shaving mug there, and its smallness on the ungainly stand reminded her uncomfortably of the gawkiness of early childhood. And she felt every ache in her legs. Now through the kitchen door, the toaster was within reach. She clicked it down with her right hand. It started glowing at once. Arkwright ought to have repaired it better, she thought. 'You never wanted a pop-up, did you, Ark?' she asked. 'Well, I'm fooling you, I don't want one now either.'

Set like a triptych, Robert in the center, her three husbands stared from the second, the older television set above the breakfast nook. Now in the kitchen, she dropped slices of bread into the red-glaring toaster. Robert reminded her: 'You wouldn't let me grow a mustache, but why?' Because it would have emphasized it, she answered privately. Sam would emit slight whinnies at outrages. He would rear like a bantam, but she blushed at that picture for Arkwright's sake, the proper one, all of whose behavior was in little labeled drawers. For loving him, you also consulted the index.

She clicked on the radio. It presented her with readiness and expediency: 'Here is my heart, take it and break it,' in a voice that might have been weaned on apple jelly and carrot juice. All the morning radio ever said was: love-love. She placed the hot-water bottle and the alarm clock into privacy, and it was Robert who grimaced, but it was away from love-love. Robert, not Bob; affection, not love. Sex put in brackets, and hard to find among remembered frills, doilies and antimacassars. And then look how life came out on the other end of the tube anyway? It only made you shade your eyes against today's sun and the next impossible impulse.

'Kitty, Kitty,' she screamed through the kitchen door, leaving it ajar. 'My, my, I'm not very alert,' she mumbled next, soothing herself like an old wet-nurse, as she saw the toast burn. And like nearly all mornings, she whispered: 'I'm on edge this morning.' Perhaps no wonder, because her birthday was just behind her, and she had planned a new leaf, new emphasis on religion. Except we Gemini girls, we always go traipsing off in two directions, each with a twin, a boy-twin, she admitted dourly.

Also a year ago, a year ago exactly today, Kitty had eaten her love-bird, irridescently green and chipper. Kitty had shown no remorse. In its cage now sat a pink cat of bone china.

At noon she was fairly jingling. Did it with two well loaded charm bracelets, seven strings of beads around her neck, tipping scales of justice in her ears, sprites of animal-figure scatter pins elsewhere. Both television sets were on in rival disharmony, and there came growls from the radio. Over it all she was saying to Martha Nesbit on the telephone: 'No no, dear, not spirituals. You know, the way their mouths open, sideways. Not rock and roll, dear, you can still tell.' She hitched at her purple dress with the inchoate lilies flecked over it, each with yellow tendrils. 'No dear,' she said. 'Yes, dear. Ah, here he comes, and he wants his liver, and he's gonna bunt me and tell me to stop gabbin' and to feed the inner man. Liver. Yes, lamb's liver, dear, always.

Yes, he's bunting me now, the sweetheart, and my mouth and nose are fulla fur. Oughta get going, don't you think?'

The cat got going. Hopped down, sniffed at the rug where he'd left the votive rat–now barely buried with a coal shovel–and jumped on the library table, rubbed his gray head against a pale blue vase that had an impossible array of yarrows, corncockles, correopsis and rose buds in it. 'Never learned this here flower-arranging. Figured God and nature always did it better,' she might be saying. The little vase tipped over and dribbled smelly water. The cat jumped down and then mounted the petit-point footstool, to sit there observing her as she kept jangling and talking.

'I've gotta go now, Martha,' she was saying. 'It's Harry at the door. Yes, the laundry man. Our friend Harry, and like as not he expects a cuppa coffee. Yes, dear, like as not.' The impatient drumming of her fingertips, and the kitchen door opening wider than cat-width, and Harry saying: 'You-hoo, is anybody alive?' and seeing the incalculable cat only, lowered himself to the edge of a kitchen chair.

'By-by now, dear,' she was saying, and the receiver came down and her jingle-jangle grew stronger as she rose, but came to the jellied stand-still at the sight of Harry in his puttees and powder-blue uniform, and deposited beside him, her bundle of finished laundry. Oh, there was something passionately embarrassing about a man in powder-blue and

puttees. As Sam would have been. There were furthermore the brown-pink cushions of his cheeks above the snug collar. Oh, if she could only make it dispassionate. The unwonted semantics robbed her of proper comments. For instance, what did 'dis' do to a word? There was the 'dis' before ease, and look what *it* did! 'Come, Kitty-boy,' she said authoritatively. 'Come and have your liver. You look right smart this morning, Harry,' but that too as if she was addressing the cat. 'And how's the missus?' And he says that something smells good and she says it's the cat's liver, and she asks: 'How about a cup of coffee?' amiably. 'Personally I feel dead this June morning, but how's living, Harry?'

'Oughtn't to,' he answers, crossing his legs, and looking smarter from his chest down. 'Oughtn't, with all the neighbors.'

She snorted: Young neighbors each with her young husband. They never reckoned with an older man, busy at his proper job. They'd think the temptation a joke, old vaudeville. 'That's not saying anything, Harry. You can do better.'

'Nice gallery,' he smirked, as if teetering between respect and mockery, and indicated the photographs of the three dead husbands. 'Goes to show you can't keep a lively woman down.'

'Life is fleeting and love can't contain it,' she supplied and wondered what she was quoting wrong. 'And the cat's hungry for his liver, and how's the laundry-world?'

'Wife is some better today,' he answered, and he studied her contours as she stooped over the cat's saucer. 'Still, all in all, what rules can you put to cancer, goin' or comin'? It ain't like summer followin' spring.'

She straightened. She looked at him. It was as if she'd heard Arkwright say again: 'You're part of me, Velma. You belong to me,' and her own bitten answer: 'Yes, like your buzz-saw.' She stood there appraising the laundry man levelly, before she said: 'I'm a widow three times over, Harry.'

'I get you, Stephanie,' he giggled. 'I get you, and there's no fur over your eyes, and a man can't help wondering.'

She wasn't having any of that. Even Arkwright, though proprietary, had had his manners. Passionate uniform, eh? But it was Robert who made her ask: 'What is dispassionate, Harry?'

"Eh? Come again?' he asked making his features farcical. 'Don't get it, or is it very private.'

'Skip it,' she said. 'The cat's got more wits than you have, Harry.' Yet she winked at him, and she appreciated the grimace of sly pain flushing over his face. She shrugged loosely at her gallery of three. 'No, cancer's no joke,' she added. 'And I always contribute to the drive.'

He uncrossed his legs, crossed his ankles. He carressed his chin. His eyes shone deep blue as from a colored photograph.

All the time the cat was indifferent. Now surfeited, finished with his liver, and shaking each hind leg in turn, left a mere polite morsel on the saucer. He walked past them as if they'd never existed. The two T.V.'s sang each from its room, and it was now about love being uncertain but eternal. The cat stalked through the music and sniffed at the fallen blue vase, and seemed appeased that it was no longer dribbling.

She had watched the cat, and Harry's saying: 'What do you say to a little affection,' affected her oddly, because she saw his eyes were no longer true blue. They looked exposed. She heard herself jangling like a glass lantern, and she said: 'It's noon, Harry. Even my cat wouldn't put up with it.'

'I'd pitch that damned cat out on his ear,' he said hotly, his tongue working along an incisor with a gold crown. It reminded her of Robert's before she made him get it porcelained.

Then she was at the door. She held it open and said with a dignity which made her proud. 'This happens to be his house as well as mine. So kindly pitch yourself out on your ear and never come here again, you and your nutty uniform.'

To her chagrin, he obeyed like Sam and Arkwright never had. Yet it was like a sign and token, and she felt sanctified.

In the afternoon, soon after the Highlife Purifier Hour on the T.V. she had a heart attack. Yet it added up to a cleansing and quite strengthening heart attack, because she had it coming to her, she could tell herself, shaking three white pellets from her palm into her mouth and wincing. She was happy the cat wasn't there to see her justifiable agony.

Should she die now, he'd find a home with Martha Nesbit, and he'd be sure of his lamb's liver at noon. She deserved this attack, and she observed her inner palpipations as if she were looking at no more than a

disturbing seascape. If life for the nonce was no longer triumphant, at least love and memory were. But she turned her face gravely away from her gallery of three.

Uncomely she sat on a straight chair and spread her legs, spreading her fingers over her heart, before she looked up at the ceiling where God dwelled above the white plaster, and she whispered: 'Dear Jesus.' A few moments later she tested her voice again, and asked: 'Where are you, kitty? I know, you don't want to see me like this. You want to see me quick and healthy.' And of course, he didn't come and look at her, the sweet beast.

She did not care at all for the voices that came from the T.V. They dripped honey and a phony Oxford accent. But with her intolerance back, she reminded herself that, of course, she hadn't had a heart attack. You could call them indigestion attacks just as well, the doctor had said. Even so, to chastise her own senses she treated them like heart attacks. Funny, in this tumultous life, none of her three men had died of them. They had been eased out more, with lung and kidney afflictions. After one of the attacks, however, she felt much closer to the inner core of life, and she could even feel that she was being addressed in important Latin, which even so she could understand. For the time being none of her three husbands demurred at her actions. It now became such a remarkable projection, that she really needed the cat as a witness.

And indeed, the cat came walking through the open door, but with a pigeon flapping from his mouth, and she heard herself saying crossly through all the Latin emanations: 'You drop that at once, kitty.'

He did. At her feet. It was a damaged pigeon. It was a plump thing and still alive. Filled with a new disdain, the cat left the pigeon lying stupefied on the rug Robert had given. It shouldn't be happening now, not with and during this upsurge of life? What could it mean, except perhaps that she was meant to rescue or heal it. She didn't want to look really, but it seemed almost as if there was a variety of small grins on the faces of each one of her dead husbands. Almost came to join you but not yet, she wanted to tell them defiantly, but for the moment the effort was too much.

Instead she sat staring down upon the stupefied bird. Even though it had folded its wings to itself, it was fluffing itself out. Surely it was trying to make itself more disheveled in order to get her pity. She

studied the cat, but he met her scrutiny stare for stare. 'You at least ought to be seeing I'm having an attack, you,' she said to the cat petulantly, making the hurt in her voice cat-like explicit. 'And it certainly felt like a final one, a real last one, a goner. But you, yes, now what do you expect me to do with that dirty bird? What I ask you in the name of everything that's decent.' Her voice became stronger, together with the feeling that she was entirely unfair to the inscrutable cat.

The cat walked away. It strode with firm dignity and dismissal through the open door. The pigeon sank its neck deeper into the rumpled feathers. As she kept staring down on it, her own bejeweled neck sank deeper between the cushions of her quieting breasts. From the bracelet on her no-longer quivering wrist, two indifferent-opal stones stared up at her. 'I wonder how close a call I had?' she asked the pigeon. 'It was a close one for both of us, I wouldn't wonder. Now why don't you get out of it, too? Why don't you get out of here, while you've got the chance. You're a dumb one. And he,' she signified the direction the cat had gone with a brusque nod of her head, 'he's decided not to take any responsibility. That's his nature, and it's the nature of the best of them. All the three I had. It was always what they did to me that mattered to them least, even Robert a bit. But he was the middle one.' She stopped and glared at the bird. 'Ah, you're trying to look like him. Well, I'm telling you why you shouldn't. It's because he came neither first nor last, and it's always the one in the middle that gets really cheated. And I don't mean me, myself. But him. The one that starts you off and the one that lasts till you don't grieve, they get off dandy. Believe you me.'

She was distracted by the sound of voices in the street. Of course, the street door was wide open. They were boys' voices, but one among them was turning heavy. 'Yes, yes,' she said, testing the strength of her voice and then of her legs and her motions as she got up to go to the door. Because the boys had just passed the house, she shouted urgently: 'Boys, you boys, come here and help me get this bird out of the house. It's a pigeon, and it'll knock itself dead against my windows. Boy's, I don't want my kitty to see it first. It'd be a pity.'

Things happened as she had learned to expect from life. There were three of them, but the two narrower ones, the younger-walking, the two pointed and less formed ones, looked over their shoulders briefly

and lunged on. Only the husky one, with firm buttocks in chino pants, turned fully, studied her and came loping back, gradually making of himself all confident swagger, or promise. And yet he was walking in the middle, she told herself, as if for comfort to herself and warning to him. 'I'll give you a quarter,' she said, as he came up the porch steps, his eyes appraising her. She could see the hairline across his upper lip and the bold set of his shoulders. For the time being she avoided his eyes.

'Never mind that,' he said in that new-masculine voice of his. 'Never mind bargainin.'

'All right then. All right, But hurry up, please.'

He brushed past her, his shoulders impertinent against her breasts as she backed against the door. When he saw the bird, he growled. 'Hell, it's a pigeon all right. You weren't kiddin'. A real bird.' He turned on Robert's rug and glowered at her, as if she had cheated him. He made no effort to pick up the pigeon.

She hurried to her purse and scrabbled for half a dollar. She wanted to push it into his hands, but both hands dangled like scoops at his side, while he kept studying her. 'Go on now and pick it up. Here's your money.'

At last he pivoted slowly. He stooped as with meaningful deliberation, and straightened with the flapping pigeon in his hands. The pigeon was in the way of the coin she kept pushing at him. He shook his head and grinned, but it was a grin with another, a further meaning, she knew. She started pushing him in the small of his back toward the open door.

'Take it easy,' he grumbled. 'If it's just this bird you want out, take it easy. You want me to get it out decent, don't you, lady?' All the time he was making the frantic pigeon behave with his capable hands. He winked at her. 'There's always some women that don't know what they want. They think.'

'It's lots you know about women. Your age,' she cried, but her voice sounded washed-out.

'My age?' he asked, but then he almost curtsied, with the pigeon flapping in his hands.

'I think you'd better free that bird. I think you'd better get it off to where it'll fly. Fly out and away,' she continued incoherently, flapping her hands like pigeon-wings.

'This bird ain't gonna fly again,' he said wisely. 'This bird looks like the cat had it. What I've got to do is put my foot on it. On its head, that's all.'

'No,' she gasped. 'No I couldn't ask you.'

'Oh that's all there is to it, lady,' he shouted, as in praise of himself, hurrying down the porch steps with the bird.

She didn't watch him any longer. It's what Harry would have done, she thought. 'Would have said,' she corrected herself aloud. Stringently she tried to take herself in hand, but she couldn't close the door on him. Instead, she pigeon-walked carefully along the edge of the living room, seeking out its darkest corner, and averting her eyes from Robert's rug. Sitting down and closing her eyes, she said: 'Poor, poor Robert.'

She intended to sit there till the cat came back. Any moment the cat would walk in, soft-footed and indifferent, and she was really in need of all his relentlessly impersonal consolation.

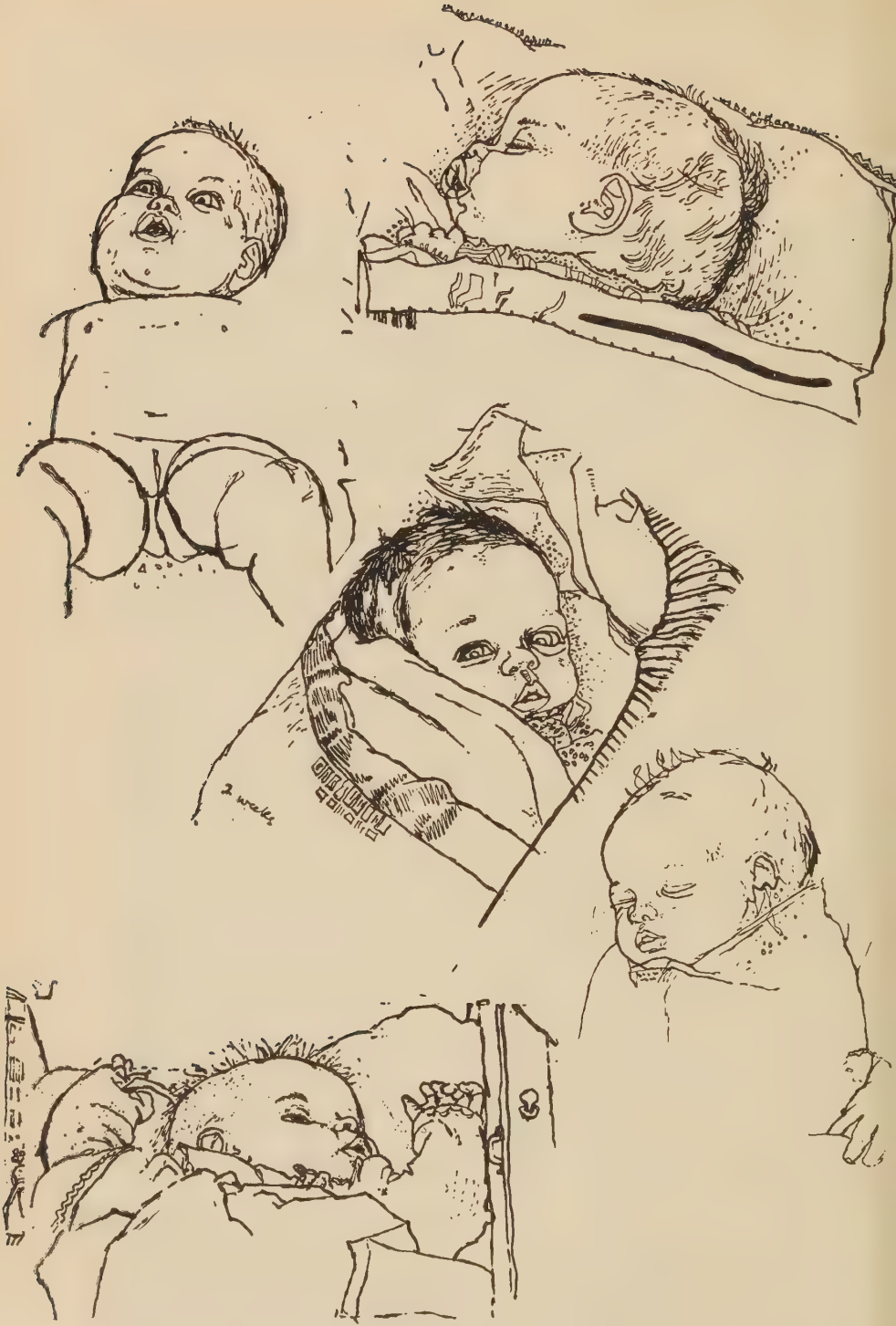
Yet when she heard the boy's footsteps come up the porch again, she felt relieved. She watched him as he walked confidently into the room, straight toward her, his hands empty. She waited. He posted himself in front of her, his legs spread, standing so close that she could easily touch him without getting up, and even felt that she would, that she might have to. She said to him as in warning: 'I'm a widow three times over. That I am; and it makes a difference.'

'Who said you're an old lady?' he asked her derisively, and watched her shift the half dollar she had not yet given him from her right hand to her left. 'You can call me Bob,' he added. 'Or Robert if it helps.'

'No, it doesn't help,' she said, standing up to come face to face with him. But over his shoulder she saw the cat walk into the house, and tread his way indifferently–never glancing at her or the boy, but avoiding the spot on the rug where the pigeon had been–toward the kitchen, keeping his impersonal consolation strictly to himself. 'I suppose,' she asked, amused at herself for feeling maidenishly flustered, 'I suppose half a dollar isn't enough.'

'I wouldn't say so,' he answered, standing shoulder to shoulder with her as if measuring his worth.

'No, I can see that. But I'm not going to call you Robert. It doesn't fit. And you needn't start grinning as if you knew what I meant.' She touched his hand timidly.



Babies' heads by Harry Moore-Gordon

A dream from the dark night

by Vassar Miller

Not a single one of Teresa's letters to John of the Cross remains. One day he suddenly said to one of his brethren that there was still one thing to which he was attached. From a sack he brought out paper after paper covered with firm, graceful handwriting, and burned them. They were the letters of Teresa of Jesus.

Teresa of Avila, Marcelle Auclair

Sometimes when the silence howls in my head
till I can hear nothing else,
when it would drown out music and discourse
(were I suffered to hear them)
here in the swirling sand dunes
where the only word spoken
cries at the quick of the heart,
where images, mind's alabaster and ivory,
blow away into dust–
her script as rare as a necklace of ash,
fine as a lizard's footprint,
vital as tendrils veining the white walls of her cell
I remember as one sucks a stone
and so take them and burn them
while I turn to You, O my God, my bruised feet
leaping the meadows of Your flesh
to the desert of darkness
where the silence speaks so loud
I cannot hear you.

Little girl in an institution

by W. G. Niemöller

My dog-eared memory
has planted the sky
with question marks
about the window;
the window has been drawn
beside the house
and flies,
a sky-boat or kite
all over the place.

The buttons down
my dress
are two counting rows
of loneliness,
the sixth finger
that grows on my left hand
keeps patiently pointing to
a promised land.

The hard spikes
on the rake of the sun
are the eyebeams of the nun
whose wings of black
and wings of white
check all flight
into Egypt,
whose red thumb
pushes each fitful day
in place like a prayer on
her rosary.

Bent and bloated
her wrecked face
lives alone
behind the last trees,
a terrifying image
reversed on a blotter
or obscenely scrawled
on a crumbling wall.

My legal cousin
will make her
and take her to court.

Already the jury,
back from their retreat,
reshuffle their feet
under the butcher's board,
clear tongue and throat
with sips of water
for their verdict on
my white daughter.

Their beards grow
and choke the vast room
with the sickly wool
of doom and dismay.

The woman ran
with broken nail
away toward the sun
(militant eye
of the sky-nun):
she screams and yells
on the spiked wheel
bound on a journey
of perpetual fall.

The Gamblers

by Ugo Betti

At the point where the valley emerges from the Apennines, broadens out a little and winds among rugged, wooded hills, the village of P . . . stands beside a bend in the river, which murmurs down below. There I used to spend whole days hidden in the depths of a dark mule stable, playing cards for money with a certain Carlo, a rather fat, smooth-faced boy with a greyish complexion and strange, deepset eyes of tobacco brown. At times we used to hear his name being shouted outside. It was his father or mother, who were going from stable to stable calling him angrily and occasionally putting their heads in and peering about in the semi-darkness.

We kept still, crouching out of sight. The door closed again, the footsteps moved away, we started to whisper once more and lay down our cards with deliberation. Not infrequently our whispers rose in furious altercation or abuse, but even then we spoke quietly. Meanwhile the shaft of sunlight that pierced the little window gradually rose from the brown and gold straw, grew paler as it mounted the wall and finally died away; outside the noises of evening began to make themselves heard in joyous confusion, the sound of the spring grew duller as the women filled their buckets in it. Then we would go out, our faces drawn with fatigue.

The inhabitants of P . . . are well known in the neighbourhood as being exceedingly ill-natured and grasping. Almost all of them are small traders who buy oil down at Puglia, and, after adulterating it, sell it in the mountain villages where oil is scarce and people don't mind if it is thin. They are practically all related to one another and look rather alike, with colourless hair and eyes and yet something fiery and violent in their pale faces. Most of them go hungry while they are children, because their mothers are so implacably mean that they even grudge them their food; then, heaven knows how, they manage to adapt themselves and even grow tall, with bony shoulders and big hands. What keeps them all so gaunt and unrelenting is their mad desire to make money and become rich. When they get back from their trips they tell one another the most profitable and ingenious tricks and swindles they have heard about and discuss them at length, their eyes shining. When they lie in bed beside their thin wives, who are sleeping, worn out with hard work and always pregnant, they go on thinking about them in the dark.

Sometimes, on the other hand, what makes them toss and turn in their beds and sigh is hatred, especially hatred of their neighbours and relations, against whom they have generally been carrying on for years, in the district capital, a complicated network of litigation. This litigation is almost always concerned with the use of tiny patches of orchard or courtyards or walls or the outlets of gutters. The fact of living next door to each other and the absence of open quarrels render these hatreds positively ferocious; you can see the people gradually growing pallid, yellow, as though they had cancer, and wandering about unshaven, bent, eaten up by the thought of their lawsuit. On the other hand, those who have been lucky and made money are in the habit of talking loudly and cracking jokes, pretending to complain of poverty in order to intensify their listeners' painful envy.

Carlo and I used to change our hideout every day, generally choosing empty stables. It was no use his father chasing him with a belt when he got home in the evenings and thrashing him so violently and to the accompaniment of such shouts that the neighbours came running out to see what was happening. I have never been able to forget Carlo's voice when he came to call for me, or suggested more dangerous hiding places, or when, in the midst of that odour of stable and greased harness, he referred to the money I owed him. His tongue seemed to be dissolving in saliva as his mouth watered with pleasure, he stammered, his hands trembled, he laughed slightly, bathed in sweat, and I realized that he was experiencing an almost painful delight. Never during the rest of my life have I felt anything like the joy of hatred, the desperation, which I often felt during those months, in those dark stables.

Even grown men avoid coming into conflict with the children of P . . ., a pallid, dusty, savage crew who will suddenly spit at you or throw stones, who stop at nothing in their malice. But I soon realized that Carlo was cautious with me. Sometimes, when he had won a trick, he avoided looking at me, and I could sense that he was trying to suppress that tremulous smile of his and the triumph which nonetheless lit up his face and made it half flush, and half turn pale and his hands grow damp. At other times, however, he would tease me, abuse me, humming a mocking refrain at me, but with an agressiveness that was too febrile, a gaiety that was too bitter, as though he was frightened. I began to realize that he was afraid of me. And little by little, almost

without wishing to, I began to take advantage of this, bullying and cheating as we played in a more and more blatant fashion, without his ever really protesting.

At times, for little or no reason, when the game was going badly for me, I would seize the cards threateningly and reshuffle them, without saying a word, while he stood silent and wan with downcast eyes and a twisted smile. Nevertheless he went on winning and I came to owe him a sum that frightened me. The thought of that money remained inside me like a kind of heavy black stone; I could feel it even when I was thinking of something else, like an obstacle that interfered with my breathing. I used to wake at night and start hatching up all sorts of tricks and frauds by which to win the money back; or I racked my brains to think what deal I could do, or what objects I could steal from my parents or relations and sell, so as to pay my debt and escape from that nightmare.

I ought to mention that at P . . . everyone thinks of stealing and everyone is a thief, but everyone is so much on the alert against being robbed of the least thing that the only ones who manage to pilfer an occasional trifle are the old women of the village. These old women are extraordinarily dried up, toothless creatures who live a whole day on half a crust of bread soaked in water and keep walking round with a black handkerchief over their eyes, popping almost worthless objects under their aprons–handfuls of straw, old corks and the like. On a path near the village there was a small bridge, and the old women gradually dismantled its walls and stole all the bricks, until the bridge was left completely without parapets.

With Carlo I made a show of calm and spoke vaguely of the various ways in which I could easily get hold of a large sum of money whenever I wanted to. While we were playing I also feigned indifference. But, inside, the hidden, savage fury with which at certain moments I forced myself to concentrate, the way my heart beat while I waited for certain cards, begging and praying for them, and then the dull dejection that came over me, or the feeling of despair accompanied by cold but insane imaginings, and then the sudden delicious revival of hope at the slightest ray of light–all this finally wore me out. I felt my face growing old, I pitied myself, I thought of my dead father.

Carlo was more open, though always with the caution I have men-

tioned. At crucial moments in the game he used to go red in the face, then even his lips turned white, at other times he would laugh ecstatically, addressing the cards with terms of endearment, or else spitting on them and whimpering like a puppy.

In a strange, almost small voice I told him to stop it, and he docilely obeyed. But at times, after listening to him for a while and pretending to laugh, I used to jump on him as though in fun, striking him and wrestling with him. In this way I gradually developed the habit of throwing him down on the hay, punching him and jabbing my knee hard into his fat polenta-eater's belly, or squeezing his throat and pretending I was going to strangle him. He defended himself panting, with a smile, twisting and jerking as he struggled, but at a given moment, as I held him tight in my arms, I felt his body (which gave off a wretched odour of hemp and maize bread) relax and yield: perhaps, being frightened of me, he was afraid of annoying me by offering too much resistance. He lay on the ground as if his heart-rending laughter had exhausted his strength. I let go of him and stood there with a gloomy feeling of malaise.

Suddenly the luck seemed to change and in a short time I had wiped out my debt. For a few days I refused the invitations of Carlo, who kept on calling for me and practically dogged my footsteps. I strolled about, I wandered down to the river, but I felt empty, listless. Then, one rainy afternoon, we went into a stable again. In the evening when we left, I had once more lost. I walked along, listening to the cries of the children and invaded by a great feeling of grief.

The next day I continued to lose. At a certain moment I sprang to my feet and tried to say something, but I stuttered, literally stuttered. Carlo watched me attentively, warily, and all of a sudden I stopped speaking. The sound of the mule munching its fodder could be heard in the silence, a fly passed across the shaft of sunlight.

Suddenly all thought ceased in me and from that moment it was as though someone else was acting. I was only an indifferent spectator. I told him he had marked the cards (I knew this wasn't true) and that I was going to split his skull open with that thing over there (for some moments I had been looking at a hoe).

He stepped between me and the hoe and we fell to the ground struggling. I managed to bang his head on the floor once or twice, in the

midst of the straw, with a dull thud. At that instant I heard a noise, something like a gust of wind whistled past my head, then I realized that we had rolled over towards the mule, which had broken loose and was lashing out with its hind legs.

Carlo lay where he was on the straw, face downwards, as though shrivelled up, and in a different voice from his usual one he said quietly that he was done for, the mule had killed him. He pressed his abdomen and I was sure the kick had struck him there, smashing his internal organs. I watched his mouth, expecting to see a trickle of black blood.

Then he looked at me hard, rose to his knees, removed a piece of straw from his back and began to laugh. He had been shamming.

He laughed with a kind of hysterical malice, one lip bleeding, his eyes dilated, terrified at his own temerity, and said with a touch of ferocity: 'How stupid you are, hee-hee, what a fool you are, hee-hee! Stupid! Stupid! Fool!'

I felt, with a kind of dull amazement accompanied by a spasm in my stomach, that something horrible was going to happen. The far-away cry of a swallow reached us in the silence. I took a step towards him. Then I suddenly changed my mind and turned my back on him.

I went out and walked along a narrow path. When I came to a lonely spot among the reeds by the river, I lay down among the tall, cold grasses and almost at once fell asleep. When I woke I saw above me through the long grass the sky that was now the colour of evening, I heard the river and, extraordinarily faint and intermittent, the blacksmith's hammer. Then that, too, fell silent and I heard only a rustling. The darkness grew deeper and I felt remote, forgotten and almost happy.

Translated from the Italian by Michael Bullock

The Cardinal

by Ellen Wilbur

Mrs. Edwards awoke at eight o'clock. She lay for a moment looking at her newly papered ceiling. Red cardinals standing next to brown nests in green trees stared at her from all sides. All of her friends had laughed indulgently at her unusual choice of bedroom wallpaper, especially since it only covered the ceiling. Mrs. Edwards had a game that she played with her cardinals. When she opened her eyes, she would stare up at them until she decided whether they were smiling or glaring at her. When they looked happy, this was a sign that she was to have a good day. Then she would arise cheerfully, not so aware of her aches and symptoms of old age. On these days she rested, feeling free of worries about her only daughter's family. The notion that she wasn't really needed by anyone vanished from her thoughts. Life was in her old bones and wrinkled eyes. Sometimes she would walk to the nearby grocery store to pick up the few articles that she needed which were usually delivered to her. It was refreshing to be out of her musty apartment, she thought. Or there was the small garden in the back yard which always needed weeding. When she felt especially energetic, she would take her old, yellow cushion which her daughter had long ago given her for gardening and spend an hour or so pulling up the ragweed which choked the flowers. After an afternoon like this, she felt secretly proud that she had helped the flowers who fought so hard and were always outnumbered.

On Mrs. Edwards' desk stood a special lamp. On the lampshade was a painting of her large, old house in Vermont. Holes were cut in the windows and doors so that when the light was turned on, the whole house lighted up. Sometimes in the evening, after eating supper in front of her television set, Mrs. Edwards would turn on the lamp and relive the old days. She could see her daughter as a little girl on the front lawn, playing imaginary games and talking to herself. Her husband was there in his library, and she was talking to the cook about dinner. Though the house had long since been sold, the enchanted lamp brought back detailed accounts of her life there.

Mrs. Edwards had noticed that of late the cardinals had greeted her gloomily every morning. She had waited a full week for them to smile, and they refused to oblige her. Slowly the old weight of her bones returned with a terrible stiffness of joints. There was no thought of walks to the store or of gardening. After supper, the lamp on the desk

was left off for when she turned it on, all old memories were the bad ones: the time when her daughter had fallen from a high pine tree and was found unconscious on the ground or when her husband had died in the hospital of a very painful kidney condition. These thoughts left her weak and exhausted. It was then that she would call her daughter, shaky and wanting assurance that everything was alright. She was never sure, and no amount of talk on her daughter's part could convince her that absolutely no one was ill, injured, or in need of her. Then, finally, she would hang up the phone, knowing that they all could get along without her. She would sit by the telephone, the intolerable silence blaring in her ears. The only sound of Miss Deek shuffling about upstairs was depressing. After a while, she would arise and slowly go to her bedroom, hoping for the sleep that would not come.

It became more and more of an effort to get up in the morning, and finally she stayed in bed all one day watching the cardinals and hoping for a change. Each day they looked sadder than before. There was one of them that she couldn't figure out. At first, she felt sorry for him since his body was completely cut off, save his head, by the ending of the wallpaper at a corner of the ceiling.

This morning Mrs. Edwards lay in bed and realized that none of her friends had called recently. She had not heard from her daughter in two weeks. She lost all sense of time. Her glassy eyes sometimes blurred. Abstract red shapes danced before her. Sometimes they were monstrous and at others they became tiny pin points of color. The restlessness left her body. She felt tension drain from her as if her blood were racing away. The cardinals crowded all around her, ever closing in with faces of anguish, except for the bodiless one in the corner. He remained distant and unmoved. Mrs. Edwards kept her eyes on his spotted face. He became more and more distant. A misty curtain slowly coverd her eyes, and she watched cardinal after cardinal disappear until in the last moment she rested her gaze upon the one who had annoyed her so much. He was fighting his way forward through the maze of color, making himself known to her. For a split second she saw his brilliantly smiling face full of love, strength, and hope. She raised herself toward him, glowing with the warmth of his glance, watching with all her might until the mist slowly took him from her sight.

The Investigator

by Richard Burns

The world had become perfect. There was no disease, no poverty, no war: concentration camps and refugees had become subjects to read about in history books and to tell one's children as bedtime stories. Where lush equatorial forests had once sweated under the sun there now stretched healthy expanses of wheat, maize and rice. Marshes were sailing-lakes; deserts were flower-gardens; glaciers were reservoirs; and mountain-tops were holiday resorts. At the North and South Poles grew orange and cherry trees.

And amongst the fair fields, the orchards, the parks and the lakes there stood fine, well-organised cities. These had no jerry-built slums, no sooty factories, no slimy canals, no foul-smelling gasworks surrounded by drab terrace-cottages. Skyscrapers like royal palaces towered to the clouds. Airy, spacious houses with trim gardens lined broad suburban avenues. In each building electricity, heat and light were circulated from nuclear-power stations. For entertainment and leisure there were concert-halls with perfect acoustics, cinemas with three-dimensional screens, and floodlit sports stadiums which held hundreds of thousands of spectators. There were plush theatres, fashionable clubs and lavish restaurants. There were hospitals and homes for the sick and unwanted, recreation centres for the young and social clubs for the old. There were schools, colleges and universities with proficient teachers and modern equipment. There were museums, art-galleries, reading-rooms and libraries stocked with the knowledge, the inventions and the masterpieces of the centuries.

And beneath the open cities were underground cities—those of the business world, immense networks of aerated offices, factories and garages. Here the natural resources of the Earth were transformed and moulded into beautiful and efficient tools for the use of mankind. And under this world was that of the mines and the railways: incessant loads of raw materials were hauled up safe, clean shafts; whilst the railways crossed under continents and continued below oceans, showing submarine splendours to travellers through transparent walls. The roads wound through tunnels under mountains and emerged to cross rivers by concrete fly-overs and steel bridges, and along them glided glossy, streamlined cars. Meanwhile silent aircraft flashed through the clouds; and in the universe beyond the stratosphere, rockets and

satellites created new moons, visited new planets and harnessed new suns.

The Earth has never been more beautiful. The birds sang sweet dawn-choruses in the orchards; the breezes played in the corn; sunsets gilded the shimmering lakes; crisp snows capped the mountains; and lovers kissed on bridges under the twinkling stars. Babies were born healthy, grew up to be tall, handsome men and women, and lived to a ripe old age.

Yet men had not found happiness or wisdom or God. Though the world was fair, Death still cast its eternal shadows, and beyond the last star in the universe there still lurked the eternal question: 'Why am I alive?' The scientists could explain many things: they could tell how the solar system was part of a vaster system of stars; they could tell where the centre of the universe was; they could tell how matter had originated from wavelengths, how life had sprung from matter, and how man had evolved from the amoeba; and they could explain every function, action and reaction of man's body and mind. Yet for all their knowledge they could give no better purpose or reason for existence than could a newly born baby. The depths of the oceans, the centre of the Earth, and the farthest star were as familiar as the poplars in the city avenues; but still men had not discovered the secret of life. Perhaps a few in the course of the centuries had known: Buddha, Socrates, Christ, Blake, Goethe, Mohammed, Leonardo, Shakespeare, Confucius–but even these had been unable to communicate their wisdom to their fellows or to succeeding generations except in brilliant momentary flashes. It was true that any man and woman could glimpse life's quintessence by transcending their own personalities in the act of love; but love grew old and the body decayed–and Death ended all.

Thus in their search for wisdom, happiness and God, men had found only knowledge. And although the knowledge accumulated with the dust of the centuries in books and museums, it did not grow in the brains or the souls of men. Since the world was now physically perfect knowledge could no longer be an end in itself. Unless the secrets could be found and the question 'Why?' could be answered, the ordered perfection of the Earth was no better, and perhaps worse, than the wildness of ancient jungles and the horror of ancient wars; for at least those had the illusion of nobility and the magic of vigour. Already men were growing restless, apathetic and miserable in the sterility of perfec-

ion. If no revelation of God occured, men would soon become machines, life chemistry, and the universe chaos.

Accordingly the leaders of the Earth met in secret and after many days' discussion and argument, they decided that they would send a chosen man into the vacancy beyond the last star to investigate the existence of God. If his answer was negative, they would destroy the Earth and every resemblance of life with the hydrogen-bombs which had not been used for centuries.

Thus the Investigator was to bear the meaning of the universe and the cares of the world on his shoulders.

* * *

He sat on the bench near the edge of the water and thought about things. On the other side of the park, where the lake narrowed and the willows hung down over the banks, was the flower-garden and the Japanese bridge. He remembered how he used to stand there on moonlit nights and gaze at the reflection of the neighbouring skyscrapers in the upside-down mirror of the water. It was terrifying to see those great concrete blocks stretching downwards into emptiness, like sinister devils' fingers pointing into the black abysm of hell. For the sky above was a friendly void, and the skyscrapers pointing upwards were sinewy Jacobs' Ladders from whose tops one could reach one's hands to the stars with the comforting knowledge that one's feet were as secure as rocks. Yet the void below was not friendly: it seemed to defy gravity and threaten the solid foundations of the earth. He remembered that tomorrow he might be in either void, in heaven or in hell, for tomorrow he was the Investigator.

But tonight he was just an ordinary fellow sitting on a bench in the park. He had been drawn to it irresistibly, magnetically. For when a man faces a danger whose size and nature are so great that he dare not imagine it, he takes a last look at the world he is leaving behind and draws strength from it, just as a baby sucks milk from its mother's breast and a soldier embraces his sweetheart. The park was both serene mother and radiant lover to him. The masculine, over-reaching sky-scrapers had no place here, and even their long shadows could not destroy the peace of the park. For the grass was as green as it had ever

been; the wind still rushed with wanton whispers through the trees; and the swans on the lake still arched their graceful necks as they had done before man had ever built a mud hut, let alone a skyscraper, and as they would do until the end of the world. The park was assured but not arrogant, comforting but not complacent, pure but not sterile. Here remained one corner of the vast and busy city where one could still laugh without having to explain why. Here one could still sing tuneless, half-formed songs inside one's head which had nothing to do with loudspeakers or televisions. One could almost forget the skyscrapers, and one could rediscover that ecstatic shiver of the spine which civilisation had almost deadened because it had no practical purpose. The park did not exist for a practical purpose: it existed for the sheer joy, the melancholy, the glory and the gaiety of existence, and that was the be-all and end-all, and that was why he loved it as a son and a lover.

'Mother-sweetheart,' he thought, 'tomorrow I am the Investigator, and I must leave you.'

He shivered–not through cold, but through fear. Could he not stay secure here in this park? Could he not merge with the trees and the grass or escape into the water? It seemed that he had lived every vital moment of his life in the park. When he was a baby his nurse had wheeled his pram along these gritty footpaths. It was on these lawns that he had tottered his first infant steps, and as an ink-smeared schoolboy he had played football in its mud with its friends. A few years later he would wander to this bench to do his homework in the evening light until he could no longer distinguish the tiny black print from the whiteness of the page. He had discovered poetry and discovered himself when reading Keats and Donne and Marlowe on this bench. Then as a student he had gone for walks with various girls and they had stood on the bridge and thrown coins over their shoulders into the water and made wishes. He had done that many times– everbody had done it. He wondered how many of his coins lay at the bottom of the lake.

But that seemed a long time ago. Tonight the sight of two lovers on that same bridge only brought a smile to his face–the smile of one who had felt as they did and could remember, but who could never feel it again. Tonight these experiences were so far away that they hardly belonged to

him any more, as if it had been somebody else who had stood in his stead on the bridge and had read poetry on this bench.

Suddenly he realised with a pang that the park was no longer part of his world and could never again give him security or warmth. Because tomorrow he was to face the fearful unknown of the universe, the park was too small, too innocent, and too pure to be real for him. He was now part of the skyscraper world, striving to know 'Why?'. The park represented a fragment of his past, like those lovers embracing on the bridge. Oh God! He wished he could be on that bridge now, with nothing between him and his dreams but the ripples of the water, the swaying of the willows, the gentle breeze through his untidy hair and the soft sweet kiss of a girl.

But it was useless to think of such things now, for tomorrow the world faced catastrophe or revelation according to his experiences. The weight was more than he could bear. He should never have driven here tonight to all these dead memories. He should have taken some pills and gone to bed early and slept twelve whole hours. That was what he would do now. He would drive back to the bungalow near the site and get some sleep and try to forget about it . . . put if off as long as possible. What was it Donne had said?

'What if this present were the world's last night?'
He shuddered, pulled his jacket collar closer around his ears, sank his hands deep in his pockets and walked to his car.

* * *

The morning passed very slowly. But for one or two hints, and his own mounting sensations of tension and foreboding, it might have been quite an ordinary day. Even the weather was indifferent: a few lazy clouds ambled across a pale sky. Those around him did not seem to share the feeling of electric hollowness which made the pulse of his blood sound like drumbeats in his ears. They went about their business efficiently and quietly. Did they not realise that today the lives of millions and their own rested on him? Or did they not know the

purpose of his mission? Yet they seemed to be too efficient and too relaxed, as though they were consciously trying to be calm in his presence. It was easy enough for them: they were not going up in the rocket. The paradox was that they were involved as much as he was, but only he realised it. And again he felt afraid. Supposing something went wrong? The past six months had been spent in testing and retesting. He had been inoculated and examined by doctors; he had checked the precautions and routines with each specialist engineer, each head of each department, and each mechanic. The machinery was flawless. It had been constructed by the best engineers and had been surveyed by teams of scientists. He had made sure of every minor detail. No. Nothing could go wrong.

The last official meeting was held two hours before the take-off. He sat amidst the leaders of the world and the presidents of the nations with glazed eyes and an inattentive mind. The world-president addressed his words to him, with his voice strained with emotion and his creased face heaving . . .

'. . . . We wish you safety and success. You have already proved yourself to be a man of outstanding character, ability and learning. You have worked under great stress with the knowledge of the task before you for the last six months, and I hope and pray that you will not break now under the superhuman strain. How you will find God, we cannot tell you, for we are but materially perfect machines. My son, the blessings of mankind go with you, for on you rests the fate of millions. God, if there is one, bless you . . .'

He saw that the president's eyes were full of tears, and realised that the last words had been sobbed rather than spoken. He sat down and gazed in front of him, like one hypnotised. Though he had been afraid before, he now knew the deepest terror of all: that of the realisation of his own utter aloneness. It was a terror which raised him far above his own mortality, for his death seemed unimportant, almost irrelevant, compared with the past, the present and the future of humanity. By one word he could make meaningless the lives of countless centuries. Although God's existence was doubtful, his own and the world's were sure. How could he even pretend to himself that the skyscrapers or the bench by the lake were fantasies created by a trick of airy nothing? Though life was not all joy and ecstasy, he had known inexplicable moments of

love which came like the Revelation, and infused his whole being with a pure white heat. Could he doubt the reality of these? Perhaps if he did not find God he would lie. But no, he could not lie, though he were to endure an eternity of hell-fire for telling the truth.

The president was offering him his hand. He took it without looking. His features were immovable and vacant, but inside his body there seemed to be a universe of tears. He shook hands with each of them, one by one, and when they had all left he still sat looking into the nothingness which would soon envelop him. Then he fell on his knees and prayed.

★ ★ ★

Finally all was ready. Dressed in his plastic suit he went out on to the launching tarmac. He had almost expected to be greeted by crowds of newspaper-reporters and well-wishers, and he was half-disappointed, half-relieved to see no-one but the ground-engineers, a few officials and the president. Somebody took his photograph on the steps of the tower to the rocket, and he climbed into the compartment with his teeth gritted and his fists tightly clenched. He was determined not to break now. He heard the airtight doors close behind him as he installed himself in the seat where he was to wait those few terrible minutes before take-off and before the mechanical, toneless order over the intercom: 'Take your sleeping-draught'. Through the transparent observation panel beneath him he could see the last mechanics scurrying for shelter. As far as they were concerned this was just another routine mission.

The whole affair was so grotesque that it seemed impossible yet so horribly true that it terrified him. He was a mortal, fallible man. How then could he have the arrogance to investigate the existence of a being who was both immortal and infallible, as though he were a high-court judge and God a guilty prisoner? And how would he know God if he saw him? What did he look like? Supposing he was invisible? Supposing he made a mistake?

'–Three minutes to zero hour. Secure your apparatus.' The pencil-shaped rocket was gradually pivoting from the horizontal to the vertical position.

. . . Yet he could not make a mistake. God would reveal himself to

him as he had done centuries ago to Christ. Perhaps Christ knew the secret and perhaps he would never find it out. Perhaps the progress of science in which he had once believed so ardently was not real progress. Perhaps Christ was nearer to immortality and the secrets of life and death in his world of disease and filth and pain and war than the most brilliant scientist today.

'–One minute to zero hour.'

He looked out of the observation panel and saw the nose of the rocket pointed at the skies. In a minute's time he would take his sleeping-draught and when he awoke he would be in the heavens. If only it were a poison-draught to send him to sleep for ever! Now the clouds had disappeared, leaving the sky a bright, happy blue. Down there they would be smoking cigarettes and staring out of the windows at the beautiful giant pencil. They would not think of it as a monster carrying one helpless man to the stars, but as a finely-perfected machine which made a terrific noise and then grew smaller and smaller as it went higher and higher and then disappeared altogether.

'Zero hour. Drink your draught. The blessings of mankind go with you.'

He reached blindly for the flask and choked down the liquid. Instantaneously he fell asleep, and the doors of the universe were opened to him.

* * *

He awoke slowly, not fully realising where he was. His mind still contained confused sleep images of upside-down skyscrapers, crazy bridges and immense lakes. Then he looked out of the observation panel and saw the majesty of the star-pricked blackness all around him like an eternal cloak of velvet studded with diamonds. He gasped. Never before had he seen so many stars, and now some of them had become larger and more golden, so that they were no longer just cold, mysterious stars but reassuring, radiating suns. He stood up and walked around the small compartment. Then with more confidence he took his bearings from the complicated mass of needles and dials on the board, which showed him that he was already millions of miles away from the solar system and from any other living thing. He was alone in a pressureless void; yet how magnificent were the stars, and how puny he was in their presence! Could he really believe that this inexpressible splendour had

not been created by an eternal wonderful being, and was instead quite purposeless, a chaos of nothing?

Suddenly the confidence drained out of him and he remembered his mission, which in the first breathtaking sight of the stars he had forgotten. Waves of apathy washed through him. Who was God? What was God? How was he to find him? Even now, in the middle of the universe he was no wiser than he had been as a boy in the park. And again all the old questions, the doubts and the fears crowded and pulsated on his brain, each one as heavy as a clamp of iron and all concentrated on one small point, twisting and spiralling relentlessly into the innermost recesses of his being. He was alone, investigating God. He had no-one to turn to, no-one to answer his insistent questions. Supposing God did not exist? Supposing God did exist and he made a mistake? Would God let him make a mistake and what would happen to them on earth if he did? Could he not kill himself and let the world continue in its ignorance as before? No, that was no use: they would only send another poor fool up into the sky who would suffer the same torments and who would not find anything either. And was it God tormenting him or his own damnable incapacity? Had he sinned, and was this his punishment; or had he been chosen to atone for the sins of the whole arrogant world, like Christ? Could he not return to Earth and tell lies, saying that he had found God? But he would not know how to pretend or what to say, and they would never believe him. They would expect him to be different in some way, to have a circle of white light about his head, to be aflame with love, to have the burning, tender eyes of a Christ or a Buddha. Oh, he knew now that he had no such eyes or light or love! He knew that he had not even a glimmer of such divinity in him, and that he was unclean, stupid, arrogant, blind and ignorant.

His inner fury ebbed away, leaving him with a core of calm, bitter certainty. For he knew now deep inside him that neither he nor any other man could ever hope to investigate God, and that the world was mad to think he could. Somewhere along the line of History mankind had gone wrong. The perfection of science and the balance and order which it had brought to the earth were meaningless. With a resigned serenity stronger than any passion, he realised that his life, and those of all the millions of men on earth were insane. The universe itself was foul and dirty because men did not know how to live.

But he knew also that if he returned to the earth and told them that the striving of the centuries had been a backslide into folly and ignorance instead of a progress to enlightenment, they would either laugh at him or sympathetically put him in an asylum, saying that he had gone mad under the strain and loneliness. But he knew that he was not mad: never before had his vision been so brilliantly clear. It was the world which was mad, not he. And what of God: was he mad too? Surely if God existed as the one all-powerful, eternal being, who was the ebodiment of love and the creator of the universe, he would not have designed life as a crazy hoax, a futile illusion? Bitterly he knew the answer, and he could have cried in his certainty. There was no God.

He looked out of the observation panel. He had now passed the last star and was in the emptiness beyond. No deep cave could have been blacker than the blackness of that nothingness; but inside him it was blacker still.

And he saw the future of mankind stretching incessantly into the blackness like a never-finished skyscraper. It was empty and hollow, and the bricks were lifeless. How could he alter this certain degeneration? He felt like a prophet whom nobody would listen to. How could he correct the balance and make men sane? If the world was mad now, it had certainly never been any better in the past; and even if it were desirable to turn back the centuries to the savage, animal state of disease and war, it was impossible. Was there no solution?

Then in a blinding flash he knew what he must do. The sweat trickled down his forehead and lined his cheeks. He felt himself go ghostly cold, and he buried his face in his hands as if to hide from the magnitude of his thoughts. But they were inescapable. There was only one thing he could do, and it was not a cowardly retreat from an eternal invincible power: it was a final conquest over the futility and the fraud of human existence, the supreme affirmation of his strength.

He stood up and switched on the intercom. His voice was hollow and expressionless as he spoke into it:

'Hello Earth, Hello Earth.'

'Hello rocket, Hello rocket. Receiving you loud and clear,' answered an excited, schoolboyish voice. It was the first contact he had made since he left the Earth, but it had no effect on him.

'I wish to speak to the President. Tell him that I am in the blackness beyond the last star.'

Within seconds he was speaking to the World President. Still his voice was hard and merciless, although deep inside him there was the tenderness and humility of a crucified Christ claiming to be the son of God.

He heard the anxious, questioning voice of the President–'Hello rocket, Hello rocket . . .'

'Listen to me,' he interrupted. 'Listen carefully, for I shall not be speaking to you again. I am in the blackness beyond the last star and I have searched the universe. There is no God. Life is futile and the world is fit for nothing but destruction.'

He switched off the intercom before a reply was possible and gazed unseeingly into the surrounding blackness. He was no longer afraid or lonely, but his face had the calm, inhuman assurance of a man who has transcended humanity and has determined to die.

* * *

Thunder reverberated across the sky. The sun was obscured by mushrooms of dust and smoke which rose higher than the clouds. Fires leapt and raged over continents and hot tidal waves engulfed the oceans. Mountains yawned and slipped into lakes. Skyscrapers, bridges, houses, cinemas, sports stadiums, museums, shops, schools, colleges, hospitals and gardening huts toppled and burned and fell into chasms and crevasses. The belly of the Earth split open and vomited mines, railways and factories to the surface. Terrified children crouched weeping by their dead parents. Burnt, disfigured men and women ran screaming through the ruins, tripping over rubble and corpses and falling into fires and under collapsed buildings.

And when the thunder subsided and the smoke cleared there was nothing left but a deadly calm over a bare, level ruin. No birds sang in orchards; no breezes played in the corn; no snow-capped mountains; and no lovers kissed on bridges. There was no-one on Earth to see the sunsets or the stars.

* * *

The Investigator turned from the observation panel and took a vial from his pocket. He opened it and took out two pills.
'And this is the be-all and end-all,' he thought. 'So be it. Amen.'
But he did not swallow the pills, for he was thrown senseless to the floor.

A million roaring thunderbolts shook the heavens and across the blackness there flashed white light. All around the rocket the universe pulsated and one by one the sun, the moon and the planets dissolved into thin nothingness. The thunder became a voice and the voice cried in anguish, 'I am wilder than fire and stiller than rock. I am life and death and hate and love within you.'
Then all around the rocket became black and still again.

* * *

He woke up and looked down at his body and saw that he was naked. He felt his chest and there seemed to be a gap between his ribs as if one was missing. He looked around him and saw that he was in a garden, sitting on a bench opposite a lake. On the other side of the lake, where some willows hung down over the banks, was a flower-garden and a miniature bridge. On the bridge was standing a beautiful woman who beckoned to him. He felt himself drawn towards her, and they stood on the bridge and kissed each other. He did not know why, but he had a strange feeling that he had been here before. He was happy.

The Day Before Tomorrow

by R.M. Eggleston

Alexandra Township, where I live, is the dark city. There are no street lights, no pavements, and the sides of the filthy alleys called streets sometimes drop down into deep gulleys where men of murder may hide.

Even the Johannesburg policemen, the Men of Goli, with their pistols and Sten guns do not dare patrol the dark city in single cars.

There are many who sneer at the Men of Goli. There are many who say that when faced with real crime, or real criminals, they are afraid.

These people say that the police wage their war on the little offender – he who will not make trouble.

These people say that when the Men of Goli come looking for passes or tax receipts, we should run away. For they will arrest for anything: or for nothing.

But not my mother.

My mother is old and, therefore, very wise. The scars and wrinkles in her face, the collapsed stoop of her fatted body, show that her life has been as long, as painful, as a doctor's sigh. And although her wisdom is not always the same wisdom as the other old mothers, it is mine . . . for she is the mother of my spirit.

And she believes in the police.

A long time ago, she didn't. Then the police killed her husband, my father. And now she does.

It was during a riot when many houses were burnt; many people injured.

My father, who had not been rioting, was watching a police party on the outskirts of the township. They were waiting to arrest any of the fighters who decided to break away and go home.

My father moved, and a policeman saw him. The policeman shouted to him to stop. My father ran. He had five bullets in his back when his fingers touched our doorsill. He died in 15 minutes.

My mother believes that if my father had gone to the policeman when he called, there would have been no trouble. The police were only looking for rioters, she says.

– Never run away from the police, Alex. The police are good. They are here to protect us. You have nothing to fear if you have done nothing wrong.

She tells it to me all the time: whenever I go out at night; whenever she hears the murder noises in the alleys at night; whenever I hide when the patrols come.

She repeated it again tonight at the celebration for my 18th birthday.

– Alex is now a man, she said, standing in the centre of the circle of

men and slowly turning round, drinking a mouthful of kaffir beer in salute to each man.

– It is my hope Alex will walk upright like a man. Not creep like an old woman whose shoulders are heavy with the boughs of years. If he is honest, he will walk upright. And if he walks upright, he has no need to fear the Men of Goli.

She stopped and looked around at each man.

– If all walked upright, and treated the Men of Goli, the protector, as a friend, there would be an end to much of this. He would have you help in finding the real evil in the darkest corners of this place.

We nodded and made murmurs because it is not right to mock the old. But afterwards, when she had left to fetch the women waiting outside, some made a quiet mock of her.

– Ko! said Phofolo. If we walk upright, then we are easy to see and catch. But the old one is right in saying the Men of Goli would have us help him. He would turn us all into spies on each other so we would have no friends, and could never band together in brotherhood against him!

– It is easy for a woman to talk, Henry muttered. The whites have no respect for our women, but they do not harass them overmuch. For a man it is different. The whites have so many laws for us it is impossible to keep them all. Let them get hold of us, and even if we are innocent of that, there is sure to be this, even if something very small, which will give them the excuse to throw us in the van!

Henry was bitter. But then he is an official of the African National Congress, and they are usually bitter with words. Their actions are never as clever.

If they could make the apartheid white man look laughable, the A.N.C. would do more for us than by their dark threats. Certainly they would get more respect from the liberal white man: though he has little enough humour in him.

– What do you do tonight? asked Phofolo to break the silence which always comes when one is political at a party.

– Haa! shouted Ephraim as my mother returned. He will be out with Karulin. Where do you go that the *tsotsi's* and the police do not disturb you?

– As you, Ephraim, retorted someone. Over the creek into the veld.

Many a husband and sweetheart has looked for you there at night when his woman is missing.

In the laughter and the fun the women entered. Karulin came to me. She is tall and straight, like a chief's assegai, and as soft as a squirrel. Her face, etched as from stone, is as beautiful as a night when the stars are happy.

One day we shall marry.

Together we laughed and jived and played tricks. Phofolo, who longed for the money to go overseas so he could join a circus, proudly showed his newest skill.

On the ground he put a thick block of steel, and into it screwed a three feet long thumb-thick steel rod. The rod was screwed at the top into a large steel ball with hole drilled into it large enough for one forefinger.

Phofolo balanced, on his hands on the top of the ball. His bare legs were bent outwards at the knee in opposite directions, and his toes pointed.

Ephraim picked up two many-coloured hoops and threw one on each of Phofolo's ankles. He kicked and, slowly at first then quickly, quickly, quickly the hoops began to spin until they were a blur of colour.

His right leg kicked, and the hoop on that ankle began spinning in the opposite direction.

Phofolo lifted his left arm, and crooked it. His hand pointed stiffly. Ephraim threw another hoop on the wrist. Phofolo jerked the wrist, and the hoop began to spin in a colour blur like the others.

We roared our 'ho!' of delight. We cheered and clapped and stamped our feet. Ephraim beamed. Then he stepped forward and waved us silent.

– And now, he said slowly and impressively, for inside his head was the roll of a great drum. And now, Phofolo, the only Phofolo, will perform in a way that has yet to be seen.

Phofolo, still keeping the hoops on legs and left arm spinning, moved his right hand so that the forefinger slipped into the hole on top of the ball.

The muscles on his arm bulged like huge snakes wrestling. His face twisted, in effort, into a show-ground mask. Then his left hand left its hold on the metal ball. He balanced the weight of his whole body on

the one forefinger jammed into the ball. And all the time he kept the hoops spinning in a blur.

We cheered and slapped each other. We stamped and shouted. For indeed this was a trick such as had yet to be seen. Inkulu, Phofolo's woman, was huge with pride. Her 'Ko!' and 'Haa' were shrieks of joy.

For almost two minutes he stayed there. Then his hand collapsed back on the ball. The evening, the dawn of night was cool but the sweat was washing his face. But he stayed balancing on the one hand for a few seconds longer. Then he dropped back to the ground, and bowed.

– Ai! cried Inkulu, swollen like a frog. No one could have given you a better birthday present than that, Alex.

– So that is why your finger is always broken, laughed someone. We thought it must have been something else!

Phofolo mopped his face with his shirt front.

– I have practised for that two years, he panted. Every morning before the bosses started work, at mealie time and in the afternoon I have practised. In the lavatory. Getting my one finger strong as one leg. Stronger even.

– Why do you not take your finger to a circus? I asked. It is something even the white man has not seen yet.

Phofolo grinned.

– These circuses are not for us, he said. Maybe for one day I will turn *tsotsi* and rob a rich man. Then will I have the money to go beyond the seas.

– Like the Coon Carnival who go to England, said Ephraim eagerly. Phofolo laughed.

– Ai! If I could copy an American crooner, then the whites would come to see me in their dinner-coats too, and say: 'What talent; what artistry!', and call me a coon, and send me in a show beyond the seas to show everyone how clever are the African. But . . . my voice is that of a truck sliding in stones!

While the party was still on, Karulin and I went across the creek into the open veld. The moon was big and its silver light was bright and clear. We had nothing to fear. *Tsotsis* did not walk in the light. In the grass we clung together and kissed. Until our blood joined into one. And then we were one.

And afterwards we lay and talked: of us, of Phofolo and his circus, of the stars, of the valleys, of the white men whose house-lights we could see faintly across the veld, of Henry, my mother, of us, of us, of us . . .

It was very late when we realised.

It was late, and Karulin lived on the far side of Alexandra. Two miles away. Near the main road to Pretoria. And we had to walk through the alleys. We went quickly.

Walking in the middle of the alleys; not running because running feet can be heard so easily. And we did not want the *tsotsis*. They would kill or maim me and rape, then maim, my Karulin.

Down the smelly alleys, past the tumbles of shattered brick that make our best houses, past the tin-and-junk- of the others. In the silver light, all were dark and secure. Even the weakest. Fortresses against the night.

The dogs growled. Sometimes there was a scream, or a scuffle from an alley. Once we heard a tin kicked ahead of us, and we slid into a gully and pressed against the earth, our mother, for safety. Five men passed. Young men in American clothes. New. Good. Many white men's clothes are not as good. The clothes of murder and robbery. *Tsotsis.*

But we finished safely.

Our kiss was quick, but warm. The way back was long, and the soft warmth was to guard me, and bring me safe for more.

I went out on to the road. No moonlight here. The violet street lights gave the sloping bitumen shadows and patches that made it writhe like a nightmare snake.

Instead of walking through the dark city, it seemed wiser to walk along the lighted road to where the veld touched it.

Then I could walk across the veld to the creek and to the home of my mother. I would have little of the dark city to walk in.

I walked with speed. The wind was cold, but the skies were clear and bright: perhaps the wind had brushed them clean.

My heart was happy in the night. I laughed in joy. I sent it spinning into the heart of Karulin, and knew it found friendship and warmth. I sent it high to the stars, and it came back cleaner and lighter: its happines brushed by star-dust.

As I reached the place where the veld touches the road, a big Ameri-

can car came slowly up the hill behind me. Its headlights picked me out. The engine suddenly speeded and the car raced towards me.

It had hardly stopped before two burly white men and an African leapt out and surrounded me. Seconds later another white man, the driver, was out.

The car had a long aerial at the back. These were the Flying Squad. The Men of Goli. One said, abruptly:

– Police, kaffir! We've a report of an assault at Balfour Park. You look like the *tsotsi* the woman saw running away.

Balfour Park is a white suburb. It was about five miles behind me. Anyone coming from there after a crime could get to Alexandra in safety through bush and trees without going near this road. Would do so.

I looked down at myself. I had slacks and brown shoes and the almost-new olive-coloured sports jacket my mother had got from a pawn-shop for my birthday. It was hard to say how many men at night would look as I did.

– You have it wrong, boss, I said in Afrikaans. I have not been to Balfour Park. I am going home. I have been taking my woman home.

– He's the one, said the biggest of the white men. A liar, like all kaffirs. What's your name?

I gave it. I told them where I had been with Karulin. I told them how we had walked home in fear. I told them I was walking along the road so I could go home through the veld. I told them my mother was lying awake waiting for me. She always waited until I came home.

I asked what time the woman had been assaulted. They said at 11.45.

– Boss, that is all right. I was with Karulin at that time. True, boss. We can go and see her.

The big man looked at me. His eyes were like a *tsotsi's*.

– We're taking you, he said.

The African sat in front with the driver. He had said nothing. He was always in the background. He was nothing. Nothing to his colleagues. Nothing to me who was of his mind and colour. Nothing. An African policeman.

One of the white detectives seemed quite friendly. He dug me in the ribs with his elbow.

– Tell us about it Alex. We'll do what we can for you. We know how it gets a man in the pants sometimes.

The big man grunted.

– You'll tell all right, kaffir!

There was pleasure in the thought, so he repeated it.

– He'll tell all right. He'll tell.

– But boss, I did not do it. Of a sudden I was afraid. I did not know where I was being taken. I knew of men disappearing before. Gone in the night without even a shadow stain to show they had been. And no one knew where.

– I am nothing, I said, trying to keep hidden the fear of my voice. I have done nothing. Please let me go. It is late.

They said nothing.

– My mother will care, I said. She is old. She has worry. I have done nothing. Please take me to her.

The big man laughed.

– After we have finished tonight, you will to to Number Four. Your mother can find her whoreson there!

No. 4 is The Fort, the prison on the hill in Johannesburg. Many things happen in No. 4. Joseph, my cousin, works at a bookshop. One morning he did not go to work. At midday his boss went to No. 4. The warder looked at his lists and said Joseph was not there. The boss insisted on looking for himself. Joseph was in the long tunnel with many others because the cells were overcrowded. He had been caught without a pass.

Because his name was not on the lists, the warder would not let him go. But he did when the boss paid the fine of £2.

In The Fort men disappear. I was frightened. But as I pleaded, the car pulled up outside a white man's house. It was alone by itself with many trees around. The other house was about 150 yards away.

All the house lights were on. The friendly policeman used his fist to knock at the door. After a little time it was opened by a young man in a blue-and-white dressing gown.

– Took you long enough, grumbled the friendly detective, speaking in English this time. We want your wife to identify this one.

The man looked at me as if dazed, and then led the way inside. He had not said anything. He left us in the kitchen when he went to get his wife.

She looked about 27. Her pimply, little-girl face was white, and in it her red, swollen eyes were like bruises. Ugly. Two little girls scratched at the woollen dressing gown she wore over her nightdress.

As soon as she saw me her hand flew to her mouth, as if to hold her sudden inrush of air. Then her chest huffed out the air.

– But this isn't the one! she cried. That one was bigger; his hair was all ruffled, his coat flapped and he had his shoes tied round his neck.

The big detective pushed his great hand into my hair. He pulled and pushed it. Angrily. He tore open my coat so it hung loose. Still the woman would not blame me.

The surly one grew red in the face and his little eyes glittered.

– It would be shameful to convict such a young man, wouldn't it, he sneered. Come now. Forget his youth. He is a kaffir and a criminal. Tell us the truth!

The woman shrunk away and her husband put his arm and his warmth around her.

– It wasn't he, she whispered. I saw him, oh I saw him. It wasn't this one.

The big man snarled but the woman would not give way. At last they dragged me out, the door slamming behind them. My breath came easier, but as soon as we were in the car the big man turned on me.

– Don't think you're free yet, kaffir, We haven't finished. We've still got you.

Suddenly I thought how to prove myself.

– Boss. If this man had off his boots he must have been running in socks. He was well-dressed. He would wear socks. His socks would tell. Look at my socks.

I untied my shoes. The big detective grabbed at my feet and shone his torch at my socks. Then his big fist smashed into my mouth.

– Swine! Look!

He held up a tiny piece of dried brown leaf. It must have crept into my shoe in the veld with Karulin. It had clung to my sock.

– So!

My mouth was bleeding and one tooth was broken. There were tears in my eyes. He grabbed my coat lapels.

– Now, he grinned. Now we will see who is so smart.

His fist hit me in the stomach. He jerked me up by the back of my coat, and his fist slammed into my cheek. The ring on his forefinger tore through the flesh. He ripped the gash down to the mouth. As I reeled back, his elbow thudded into my ribs.

– Talk, kaffir. Tell me the fun you have had tonight.

My stomach ran into my throat to hide. My head dropped and the tears poured from my eyes.

The big man cupped his hands round my throat and began to squeeze. The stomach in my throat grew large in fear and my breath bottled. But the friendly policeman muttered something, and the big one dropped me.

I was sobbing, and my stomach had turned to vomit. The friendly one slapped me across the head.

– Shut up. You're going home.

They dropped me near the bus depot. It was 4 a.m. The queues were already long. As I got out, the big man said:

– Anyway, kaffir, you should know better than to be roaming about in the early morning.

– I was taking Karulin home, I sobbed. Just Karulin. You would not expect her to walk alone through the dark city?

I raised my head.

– Or should I have the policemen protect her?

The friendly one leaned over.

– Forget what happened to you, Alex. It was a mistake. You trust the policeman. We never hurt anyone innocent.

The faith of my mother . . . that old one.

Poems | by Florence Victor

RAIN

'The Seasons,' said the radio,
And still it rained –
The static had refused to go,
And I complained.

The drops plunged down as if they were
Of berries made –
And though the sidewalk crushed each one,
I was afraid.

Only the clothesline in the yard
Did anything
To stop the rain from playing God,
And thundering.

It strained to catch each drop it could,
As if it played
A game whose rules were understood,
And fairly made.

I watched as liquid pellets poured,
When suddenly
The drops began to strike the cord
Importantly,

As though their section sat beside
The violins,
And plucked the string where it was tied
By four clothes-pins

Which served as pegs, and deftly strummed
Vivaldi's song,
As if one part had not been sung
For very long.

The seasons sang seductively
To claim the rain –
An orchestrated courtship, free
From fear or pain.

Yet as spring, summer, winter, fall,
Cried with reproof,
The rain ignored each frantic call,
And stayed aloof.

I felt four seasons fade nonplussed,
And tried to find
If rain comprised a fifth, or just
A state of mind.

SURGERY

Can you predict intelligence? I can.
I spot it on the day that classes start
And anchor all my lectures there, although
I'm not at all immune to legs in shorts,
Or pony-tails, or big blue puppy eyes.
It is alertness, though, which ruins me;
The Jewish face from Poland, or the boy
Who *wants* to be a Catholic, and all
The cafeteria atheists can sneer.

Last term I had a sophomore whose face
Would sabotage my lectures with the lie–
Detector gaze she had. She could have come
From any concentration camp, instead
Of growing up in Forest Hills; but still
She worried me with all she understood.
The summer put an end to all my fears.

The term began today and I have lost
My nerve. I called the roll and saw her name
And felt I would be teaching after all.

I raised my head and saw–I don't know what
I saw! A small pug, showgirl nose peered up
At me as if it were too weak to hold
A face together. I couldn't meet her eyes,
(Though they would never sadden me again)
And hoping that my face would not collapse
I taught the class, and cried when I got home.

Poems | by Harry Morris

METAMORPHOSES

Precarious, I was above a gull
And saw him plunge, unswerving to a rest
Some distance down. My eyes rode with the pull
As earth rushed up; my eyes behind his crest
Transformed my flesh to his, and I was Icarus.
I knew the deity he felt in flight
Till, crucified against the sun, he fell.
And I was Tereus,
Wrenched from flesh to feather to feed the fright
Of Procne and of Philomel.

NEW YORK: UPTOWN, WEST

The park at riverside flows green
And grey in rows of ripples out
From shore. It flows beneath the arch,
And arch curves over river whose
Surface echoes crackling pins,
The only ghost of Hendrik, Rip,
And lazy days spent high among
The ragged Katskill love-kept lawns.

A park road rises on a blade
Of clover, vaulting to the east.
Under the concrete massive approach,
The green strip stretches south, beyond
The domed tomb and lancet church,
The one an entrant to the next.

And lower than the tomb, in Hell's
Vestibule, the undecided
Hang on straps and vacillate,
Inverted pendulums. They stop
Aslant upon the quarter hour,
Emerge from doors denied to none,
And mount the stair to Spuyten Duyvil.

A ferry's strong parabola
Defies the ancient river pull
To bring eternal searchers home
From a palisade Coney Island
Where too bright sequins wink across
The river to lovers in the park.

Story

Yvonne Coenca

To Vidal, my father, and E. W., my mother

My father was a Spanish Jew from Salonika, a Greek town then under Ottoman rule. Both Turks still proud in the fading extension of their Empire, and Greeks, only superficially dominated since they still lived their land, working and breathing it among trophies of their youth– were contemptuous of his people, so long ejected from their cradle and dispossessed of their decorated mansions.

Probably the Greeks hated these peaceful intruders of four hundred years more than their Ottoman invaders whose power they could respect. While the young Turks with knives in their belts killed without particular hatred and for sport, those with least defence: such as an old Jew who by day sold oil in cupfulls from two pails he bore across his shoulders. At night, in the dark alley ways of that small hot town in the marshes they beat him down and threw away his oil. Lying on the pavement he watched it trickling down the gutters.

My father left his home town because the Young Turks declared a new freedom under which he was liable for conscription in their army. Besides, his family needed his support and there were no chances there for a young man. Meaning to go to America, land of dreams to all materially poor people, he came to England where he married my mother.

They had only poverty in common.

Her parents had come from a village in Germany, and hers was not the silken canopy but wooden pew of Calvinism, austerities and idea of sin, personalised by her father who was a joyeux with a fine moustache who ran away from his severe wife. Once he returned to her but the door was kept shut to his knocking while the children listened upstairs in fear. Their mother turned dressmaker and the house hissed with steaming irons, snapped with steel scissors and prickled with economies and pins.

Summer in Salonika, schoolboys roaming. Young gallants to whom giggling Turkish girls unveiled their eyes. Listened to the songs of a wandering French troupe performing in a cafe (Ordering water, drained the dregs of Turkish coffee left on the table, an inch of sugar in the small cup). 'In the sea there is a tower, in the tower a window, in the window a cage, in the cage a dove who loves the sailors'. 'In Spain the girls are very pretty and the sea is always blue. The men are great liars but then everybody knows it'.

But in Forest Gate, E. 8., bustles and long serge skirts of an unyielding morality went in and out of the German dressmaker's house. In a room full of heavy furniture my mother, poor child with a cloth doll, wept as her sister sang in her dusting of Genevieve, sweet Genevieve . . .

I grew up in a third background, the green prosperity of suburban life with its small well-carpeted houses, casually busy Launderettes (so

many have washing machines in their homes), roses in summertime, ight fragrance and thud of tennis balls from the nearby park.

I did not understand my surroundings, those of English middle class ife, so mild, so pleasant, confined and understating. I was a stranger in ny school which had the finest cricket pitch in the district and a stranger ven in our pretty doll's house. I felt unfamiliar with the English tongue which I had spoken from my first words. My sentiments did not fit the diom.

Yet difference in kind was less then my own incompleteness for I ven lacked feeling for everyday things and so did not understand the nterplay of everyday talk. Incomplete without my father. I remember, s a child, roaring with laughter when he danced with the silhouette of kitten catching flies behind a curtain on one sunny summer's eve, but ater I did not hear his talk which is all about human freaks and preferences and rights. He closed up like a flower in a sharp frost against the tmosphere of our home, the silences and uncomprehending stares cross the tablecloth and teacups. Our cat was something of a wild cat nd the dog quite definitely neurotic.

Without human contact I became absorbed in landscape which made me more melancholy. Nearest to me the woodland park on my way to chool. Mist in trees, rain dropping, sod shredded with autumn leaf, quawk of a duck on the frozen lake, outside, the orange street lamp.

I was going to travel round the world, to America by cargo boat, bsorbing and sifting everything where the most violent contrasts might hrow me into relief. So that I should resolve my isolation and discover what I was.

I was going to University to take a B.A. in English Literature, and hat was far more practicable. As I saw it, the course included history nd psychology (the reactions and counter-reactions of every age) and oetry by which my cup should be filled with the feelings of man. Then, with this three-fold perspective extending from Anglo-Saxon where the course began (I did not dream of tracing my own racial oots) and by the constant use of an analytical and universal intelligence, hoped to understand what I should have felt, my place in the world.

But I gladly left my University and even my professor in English ecause the provinces proved more alien to me: chemical-manufacturing nd ball bearings, a drunken woman, apron now discarded, in the bus at

eleven, dance halls and October chill in the air, while damp moss grew in grey stones walls of Victorian residential fortresses.

When I took the train back to London I assumed that no relationship with any human being was possible for me and that I was some half-formed cretin of human emotion.

Penguin books at 2/6d. Psychiatry for the layman. Poor fool, I wished to discover my category of mental illness. I read Sartre and discovering that I was Jewish used against myself the voice of his Anti-Semite. Said that was why I could not understand my native language.

One Christmas I attempted suicide, when there was no holly in the house, no cakes and no people. At Christmas above all one should not be lonely and I had been a foreigner for years, one who did not even know his native land. I was not seeking blankness or final death, but the reverse, the solution of my predicament to be found perhaps in unconsciousness or beyond death.

I was revived. Still in force in English law is an ancient village ideology which said my life belonged to the community whose property I was therefore damaging. I waited six days in prison for this 'case' to be tried.

I wanted to kill myself again for there, I believed, I reached the utmost point of misery even which I had not known before but nets hung from storey to storey to prevent suicides. Walls were green. Legs of idiot faces ran to fat on the bread and potatoes of justice (and were red and chapped with cold) as even in prison not every woman would wear the thick stockings that went with the black shoes. In the winter sunshine sat one happy prisoner who nursed her new-born babe, fresh and pale like a snowdrop in a cemetery.

Story by a Borstal girl: 'The doctor asked me 'Are you a virgin?' 'Yes, in my right ear', I told her. I was done in by an American soldier on my fourteenth birthday. In a garage. It was a Saint's Day, too! My father had taken my sister and me for a trip, he would be wild if he knew!'

'Now the Psychiatrist, she's a tough one, went down to a girl in the cells and told her, 'I am going to treat you as a mental case,' and the poor girl collapsed like a fried egg'.

On my way out to trial I waited in a cell, a body in a coarse cloth dressing gown and my inappropriate high-heeled shoes, so cast off, it seemed, by my human race, that even my bread was passed under the door wrapped in brown paper.

was released. Without further concept of what might bring me to have a part in human life, it seemed that I must wander always in the mud tunnels of the underworld with prostitutes, deficients and other cripples by banks of dark rivers, hatred and self-mutilation.

In the next springtime of my adult life I was born again and began to laugh like a well-fed child. I found and adopted a new and natural mother, not English of course, nor German, nor even Spanish. Czechoslovakian by passport (before she married an Englishman) but in true fact a German-speaking Austrian. No wonder it had taken me so long to find her.

Her first voice was the voice one uses to an animal frightened by too loud a noise. And she told me stories, that high in the Alps is a wild mountain stream where sparkling water gushes between the stepping stones and for a moment she was afraid to jump. We ate têtes d'indes, éclairs with round and shining chocolate heads that they serve in the Coffee House in Vienna, haunt of old Franz Joseph. She has lime-yellow curtains and Staffordshire china dogs and shepherds with their loves in bowers and Solitaire balls like fishes from the South Sea coral reefs.

Glorious woman! The gentle curve and rich voice. A woman of Europe, a statue of Versailles, Rome, Renaissance marble. A woman whom my maternal grandfather, bon vivant of Forest Gate, would have admired, and a woman who could have loved my Spanish father.

For me, that first springtime, the grass was greener and the blossom pinker as if my perfume were poetic mescalin. Like an underground stream contentment rose and flooded the arid fields making them grow corn and poppies and I loved the unloved loves of all my life. A pretty young Spanish girl who wore rings on her fingers and pearls in her ears was playmate of my senior childhood and as a minor token of the new warmth uniting me with the human race, I began to hear rhythm in music and understand the sentiment of popular songs. I jumped for joy.

Time passed

For a while I left London for Oxfordshire. Autumn-winter, spring will follow, change in leaf and sod. The earth is a gentle curve and I imagine curves under the earth, becoming red and molten as they near the centre. The wind is a broad black line which cuts down through me into the earth.

February: and we acknowledge that spring has come, yet it has always been. At six in the morning the sky is the blue of a Spanish garden but in seven minutes it steps behind the whiter light of an English day and the bare branches thicken and become real. In those seven minutes the Lord God said, 'Eat of the honey, my son, because it is good and the honeycomb which is sweet to thy taste'.

The Last Word in Creation

by Peter Shrubb

Harold King and I once found half a tin of green paint of my father's in the garage. Defying fate and father both, we set to work greening up the butterbox body of my racing billycart; and before we had finished even one sleek side of it Harold painted the whole back of my right hand. For a minute terror darkened the little sunny clump of pussy willows which hid us; but then Harold put his kind arm around me and proposed a scheme. My hand stood out merely because it was different, he said. He *proved* it to me; so I let him go ahead and paint my other hand, my knees, and my face.

I was blind youth's first victim, but not last. There were many such King schemes, and I could have been killed times without number; but I survived, and I was a witness when the last scheme ran its course.

This was some years later. My complexion by then was no different from that of most freshman students in the Arts Faculty of the University of Sydney, and my chief study, like theirs, was the opposite sex. And as I began my first serious survey of that sex, Harold began his great experiment. He was sprawled, that famous morning, over one of the huge wooden seats that line the cloistered end of the quad, with his blue eyes shut against the light; and I sat opposite him on a warm stone ledge with the sun on my back. He talked, and I watched young ladies of all delicious shapes and sizes and colours stroll warmly by. 'The human mind,' he said, 'is the most wonderful instrument imaginable. It is the

ast word in Creation.' As if by magic, a whole pretty covey of physio-herapists appeared, and the sun touched my cheek.

'Yes,' I said.

He talked on, and another bunch of people came down from the ibrary to take the sun for a few minutes. Amongst them were the only wo girls I actually and positively knew well: twins, Fiona and Janet Mackenzie. I waved, but they merely waved back; so I pretended to eturn my entire attention to Harold. He was saying something about raining his mind to count by itself, in seconds: which some people could do naturally, he said, people who could wake up at the exact time hey wanted to, for instance. He said that if they could, so could he. It would prove something or other. I forget what.

'Another half-hour, okay?' Harold murmured.

'And then to Spiro's.'

'Right.'

It was a Wednesday night two or three weeks later. We were up in the library tightening our grip on the Pre-Raphaelites; Harold's moon face hung opposite me, and here and there at other tables, under green-shaded lamps, beneath dim bookshelves, slouched interesting and friendly people of other kinds and both sexes, reading and pretending to read. I felt very pleasantly a part of it all.

I looked around, and read, and looked around; and all at once Harold reached across and tapped my arm and said, 'I think you'll find we have ten seconds to go from NOW. Nine, eight, seven, six . . .'

Crazy man, I thought. But then I understood what he was getting at; and my hair prickled. In the classic manner I stuttered, 'You don't mean . . .?' And he answered, simply, 'Yes.'

But it was about the last word I could get from him. As we descended the dark staircase my breath came back and questions popped from me like seeds; and over and over again he merely smiled and shook his head and said no, not yet, it was not time yet, it wasn't finished yet. I badgered him, but he was adamantine. The only question he answered was one I didn't ask: in the dark frosty quad he told me that the name of his new mental discipline was *Eumetrics,* which as far as he was concerned was Greek for *happy automatic counting.* And that was that, there was no more; the rest was silence.

So in the swaying and rattling downtown tram I contained myself as best I could, and began once again to look forward to Spiro's. We walked in past the Powder Mountain nose and Walnut Hollow eyes of the old troll who ran the place, gave her a courteous good evening, which she kept; and there, sure enough, above the waist-high plastic oak partition of the sixth cubicle along the orange wall to the left, like a jewel in clay, shone the lovely top of Janet's head. Fiona was with her, and they did not seem displeased to see us.

Old Troll watched us sourly, and blew her neck out like a lizard at the unsavoury people who hung over the end of our table from time to time, talking. There was Eureka Bentley with his petition to the Senate on the question of sexual freedom; there was Jock Smith, our poet; there was Tony Fitzpatrick, who in his first year drank himself *non compos* sixty-five nights in a row to break the college record; there was Jack Gilchrist, with a very hot young woman called Philomena Drummond whom Harry Flicker had recently sold him for a suitcase full of books by Bertrand Russell; there was Billy Bergdorf, a sort of pirate; and there were others. They had their difficulties, and presumably have still.

The only one with nothing to say was Harold the Talking Clock, who very soon rose, murmured that though time was not up he would have to go, and went.

At about half past nine the next morning I ambled into the quad and staked out the warm centre of the first big wooden seat; and there, a moment later, only two yards away, was Janet. In shadow, but a source of light, an angel. Light glowed around her and through her, from her head to her toes; she was a flower encased in translucent amber, a marvellously clever Aphrodite in jade come to warm breathing life here in raw old flat Sydney; soft slow light like a new skin was part of her.

I discovered in a minute that she had simply happened to stand in a bright confluence of reflections; but it was a beautiful accident, and it served, at the time, to put Harold out of my mind completely.

Three nights later, however, at almost exactly ten o'clock, something rattled the window of my room.

I was horrified to think that the unimaginable things which hid

outside windows now actually waited outside mine; but as if I were brave–for I half believed, still, that Janet could somehow see everything I did–I put *The Blessed Damozel* quietly down, turned off my desk lamp, and crept unwillingly to the curtains. And with love and relief descried, half in the shadow of the flame tree, none other than Haroldus Eumetricus. I banged the window up and said, 'Harold, are you mad?'

But he didn't see that that was so funny. 'I can't stop it,' he said.

There was something about his weightless moonlit voice that immediately made the night seem colder. I hesitated, and then placed my hands magisterially on the window-sill: you can't stop what, I was about to ask–and out of that thin shade like a ghost he started, chattering, 'My head my head my head! It won't stop! I can't stop it! It keeps on going!'

I was the helmsman of an ancient windjammer entombed in some huge Antarctic wall of ice. For a century I stood there, frozen.

Then the wind touched the flame tree, and I shivered. People had hiccupped to death; and they had died from the water torture, from that regular, soft, inescapable drip drip drip on the forehead that in hours can wash a mind away without trace, as if it never had been. Terrible, terrible.

I slowly lowered myself through the window. There was an awful greenish, inward look on Harold's face. 'Come for a walk and warm up a bit,' I suggested. He nodded like some sort of automaton.

Half an hour later we were in Spiro's, exhausted. I had been talking almost uninterruptedly all that time, but to no effect, for as far as I could tell Harold heard nothing but whatever was going on inside him. And both this and his air of desperate suspense were infectious, I found: by the time we reached Spiro's I too could conceive of myself as the mere wall around an irresistible force, and I understood Harold's fear of exploding only too well. But in this latter, as it turned out, I had the bull by the foot, for Harold's fear was of quite the reverse; though not even he could have told me that just then.

He sat opposite me beneath that horrible orange wall, as dazed and unhappy as ever. Two coffees came. He stared at his, and his hair looked like that tall African grass we always used to see in boys' books parted by snarling lion. I began to wonder if this time, for all his youth and innocence, his unmatched innocence, he had not really gone too far.

'What's wrong with this man here looking like a slack-stringed

viola?' Billy boomed in my ear. In his great sandy dufflecoat he looked a comforting mixture of sea captain and Jesuit missionary; and as his greeting made it plain that Harold's indisposition would not be easy to conceal, I confided to him, in a general way, what had happened. But he was no help. 'The soul's crisis,' he said.

Then along came Philomena to find out what we were up to; and of course Billy immediately told her everything. She became terribly intense. 'Have you read Freud?' she asked me.

I shook my head.

'No no no no,' said Billy. 'That's not it. Harold's simply an independent method of keeping time entirely, like the Jewish calendar. He could be very useful, he doesn't need treatment.'

'Can you *hear* it ticking?' Philomena went on passionately. And she straightway snuggled up next to Harold, put her arm around his neck, and pressed her cheek somewhere near his ear.

I presume that all she heard was the sea, for in a moment she withdrew her cheek again; but she didn't unsnuggle, and the arm which had been around Harold's neck merely slid down till it was around his waist. 'What an interesting man,' she said.

'I have the feeling that the pressure's easing a bit,' Harold said suddenly, to our great surprise. They were his first words in nearly half an hour. Then he rubbed one hand over his eyes, leaned back in his corner, over Philomena's arm, and went to sleep.

At first she watched him quite affectionately. We carried on a quiet conversation, the three of us, and heard a good deal about Billy's early life. 'Why don't you take your arm away?' he said. 'It must be agony. He's fast asleep, anyway.'

'He certainly *is*,' Philomena said. She pulled her arm out; for a minute she couldn't straighten it.

Harold didn't wake up till about ten minutes after they'd gone. It was about eleven thirty when the twins arrived; they stood looking down at him with sympathy while I told them what had been going on, and Fiona, when she sat down, sat down with a bit of a thump. Harold woke up.

'Oh Harold,' she said then, 'are you all right? Has it stopped?'

Her voice was full of concern, and Harold – though I think he was a little confused at first that it wasn't Philomena's – reacted to it very

quickly. He rubbed his eyes, stretched himself, and nearly smiled. 'Yes,' he said at last. 'I think so.' Then he added, 'See for yourself.' And with an expressionless face that deceived no one he warped his great ear in about as close to Fiona as he could get it. From that moment on, of course, his real troubles began.

The Fair of San Gennaro

by John McPhee

Jenner came out of the BMT at Delancey Street and walked a few blocks south and west, heading toward the glow of light. She couldn't see the fellow very well. She first heard his footsteps, running up behind her. The street, Broome between Elizabeth and the Bowery, was dark and she was alone in the block. She didn't look around but kept on walking.

'Lady,' he said. She turned and before anything else saw the knife, its fixed blade nervously rocking so that it caught light and lost it, caught it again. 'Don't yell. Help me,' he said. 'Please don't yell.'

'What do you want?'

'I want you to walk with me, in the fair. Not for long.'

'All right.'

They walked on into the edge of the crowd. Tables had been set out on the sidewalk; old Italians were sitting at them, arguing, laughing and drinking burnt coffees. Waiters in small white aprons squeezed in and out among the chairs. Everyone liked to think that it might have been Naples.

The old people made close watch on all who passed. Some nodded with pleasure when they saw Jenner and her escort. If they were not Italian, they were at least a young man and woman holding one another's hands and walking out for an evening of pleasure. All the Italians approved. 'Remember, don't try anything,' the young man said to Jenner. 'I don't want to hurt you, but I will.'

'I said "all right"', said Jenner. 'Put that knife away. It bulges too

much.' He had the knife blade up under his jacket sleeve and the handle in his hand. 'Go ahead,' she went on. 'Move it. That's a terrible way to carry a knife.'

'Shut up.'

'I'm only telling you for your own good. Leave it there if you like. You'll just be picked up sooner, that's all.'

He moved the knife to his inside breast pocket. They went on into the light that blazed down from uncovered hundred-watt bulbs spaced along metal piping and arched over the streets. In the brightness she glanced up at him. He wore a cap and under it he had handsome dark hair, but he needed a haircut. His nose was straight and his mouth strong; he had dark eyes and was much younger than she had thought, maybe twenty-one or twenty-two, younger than she by half a dozen years.

She took a firmer grip on his hand and led him into the mainstream of the Mulberry Street crowd. Along the curbs, concession followed concession. People were trying to pitch nickels onto dinner plates, break balloons with three darts, knock over cloth cats with soft baseballs. Huge numbered wheels were spinning. The lucky one-in-ten-thousand shot could win a portable TV. Every fifth or sixth stall sold food, mostly sausage heroes packed in a bed of red and green peppers and onions. Men and women stood shoulder to shoulder at counters eating cherrystone clams, shrimp, lobsters. Children had cotton candy, candied apples, and Italian ices, orange and raspberry, at fifteen cents a cup. There was beer in barrels, cartons, beer stacked in garbage cans full of cracked ice; and the city air was full of the smell of charcoal broiled sausage and the sound of aria, Puccini, Leoncavallo, Verdi, Verdi, Verdi.

'We'll go through here to the next block then I'll go down that street', he said. But at the corner they looked toward the edge of the fair and saw the flashing red dome light of a police car. He hurried her on to the next corner. Up the side street was another squad car.

'What did you do?' said Jenner.

'Let's get back,' he said, pushing her toward the center of the crowd. Two streams of people pressed into one another in the middle of Mulberry Street, going in opposite directions. Jenner and the fugitive let themselves be caught first in one flow, then the other, moving north, then south, with no aim.

'What did you do?'

'Shut up,' he said again, not looking at her but turning his head this way and that as if he were hunting someone he had lost in the crowd or perhaps looking for a way to get clear of Jenner as well as the police.

'Whatever you did, if you don't want to be caught you'd better throw away that hat,' she said. 'Who ever heard of a man wearing a hat like that on an evening out with a girl?'

It was a khaki fatigue cap, the sort the Cuban rebels wore. He ignored her and went on looking over the heads of the people, watching for blue uniforms.

Jenner kept on talking. 'You're going to be picked up in about two minutes,' she said. 'I would give very little for your chances.' His eyes stopped scanning the crowd and looked directly at her. 'Why did you stop me?' she continued. 'What could you possibly have wanted with me? Did you think that having me with you would make you look like just another guy out at the fair with his girl?'

'That's right,' he said.

'Then play the part yourself.'

'What did you say?' He nearly shouted because of the barkers, the violinists, the aria singers and the thousands of noisy people.

'Play the part. You stick out like a sore thumb. Understand. Play the roulette game. Laugh. You look like someone who's wanted by the police.'

'What?' he said, leaning down.

'You look like someone who's wanted by the police,' Jenner shouted. He took her by the arm and squeezed the muscle hard, dragging her between two concession booths and back to the narrow passage of sidewalk remaining between the backs of the booths and the store fronts. In the relative quiet, they could hear one another easily; he whispered loudly and angrily.

'Do you know what's good for you?' he said. She looked at him steadily and didn't answer. 'One more stupid act like that . . .' He showed his knife again.

Large tears welled up in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She looked on, steadily, into his eyes and said nothing.

'Jesus Christ,' he said, and turned away.

She took a handkerchief from her purse and carefully patted each eye, trying to smear her mascara as little as possible; nonetheless two

streaks of blue did come off. She returned the handkerchief to the purse and snapped it shut. 'If you want to blend into the crowd,' she said, 'you have to be like them. These are happy people out for an annual fling. They're spending money, taking chances, listening to their favorite music. They're all smiling. You don't fit in. You're frightened...'

'I'm not afraid of a god damned thing.'

'You're preoccupied. Your eyes are too shifty. Come on, take the cap off, I'll take your arm and we'll pretend we're enjoying ourselves. You can buy me a hero.'

'I have no money.'

'Here then.' She handed him five dollars. 'I brought that to spend tonight anyway.'

He stood motionless and speechless for a moment, then reached out and took the bill.

'What's your name?' she said.

'Rock Kennedy.'

'What's your real name, Rock Kennedy?'

'Ferenc Zsuzsi.'

'My name is Jenner.'

She moved through the narrow space between concessions and he followed. Halfway through, he ducked down and pitched his cap under a wooden platform. On the street she took his arm and smiled up at him like a bride of twenty-four hours. They walked without speaking. 'This place all right?' he said eventually, and stopped at a food stand to buy two sausage heroes, wadded with onions and peppers.

'Come on, Frank, try the darts,' said Jenner, pulling him along to a booth where he paid twenty-five cents for three tries at any of a hundred balloons. His first two darts missed, but the third hit a balloon and it popped. He won no prize but he did smile. 'You're getting the idea,' Jenner told him.

She let her hand slide down his arm to grip his hand. He began to forget himself and look for more games to try. He fired rifles, threw baseballs, took a basketball shot, and won on the odd numbers in roulette. Watching him, Jenner was pleased with herself. She had turned him into the most typical twenty-one-year-old on the street. What could a boy with such a gentle face have done to be a fugitive from the police? It didn't matter very much; he could have robbed, or

broken out of somewhere, or even murdered or raped for all of her. Jenner was a little mad. She didn't care, so long as he had picked her for his partner in getting away.

Two young policemen came up the thoroughfare from the direction of Canal Street. They stopped by a stall where a fat woman with wispy grey hair was rolling mozzarella, cottage cheese, and sliced ham into thick dough and frying it in deep oil. They seemed to be looking carefully through the crowd. The fat woman tried to sell them a couple of her calzoni but they paid no attention to her.

Jenner discreetly pulled Ferenc away from the rail of a nickel pitch. 'We'd better head back up the street,' she said; but they turned and another pair of policemen were coming that way, too. Jenner felt the boy's muscles tighten as if he were about to break into a run. 'Don't be foolish,' she told him. 'Here.'

Across the street in a vacant lot was a ferris wheel, cramped between two buildings with its top rising far above the rooftops. Jenner and the fugitive crossed to the ticket booth, where a handpainted sign said 'Ferris Wheel, 15c.'

'Buy six,' she said.

Ferenc handed the woman in the booth a dollar, took the six tickets and started away. The woman called after him and he went back to get his ten cents change.

They had to wait in line. 'Put your arm around me,' Jenner said. He hung an arm over her. 'Put your arm *around* me,' she said again. Ferenc drew her in beside him.

'That's the idea. Look at the others.' Almost every young fellow in sight was slouching against a girl, one arm dangling around her. The man took their tickets; they sat in the pendulous seat and he clamped down the safety bar; he pulled the big lever and they rose through a short arc before the wheel stopped at the next chair to unload and load again. Thus they went toward the top in small stages. After the second stop, they sat swaying twenty-five feet above the watching crowd. The police were there, of course; and when they turned toward the ferris wheel Jenner turned to the fugitive and pulled unobtrusively at his shirt until he understood and kissed her. 'Don't stop,' she told him. 'Not until we're up above and out of sight.'

When the rising seat stopped one stage below the top of the great

wheel, it swayed unsteadily and they looked far down at the scene beneath them. The Fair of San Gennaro was going at full current. Near one end of the main, Mulberry Street midway, a politician was flailing his fist against the wooden railing of an elevated platform, shouting into a microphone that amplified his excited Italian across the babble of the streets. Toward the other end a plump soprano on a bandstand was singing *Caro Nome*. Small, old men circled her, accompanying her voice with violins, and the people in the street nearby were not moving and grinding one another as they were everywhere else. 'La Scala is a juke box,' Jenner suddenly cried out. 'Don't you think so, Frank?' Ferenc merely stared at her.

'Look at the coals,' Jenner said, leaning forward and pointing down into the red fires everywhere on the grid of lighted streets. The smell of burning charcoal and cooking meat was all through the air even at that height. The fair was whole from up there. They could see it all, watch the mechanical toys bobbing around on the pavement by a vender's stall, the jammed people sliding by one another, the sparkling reflection of light in the liqueur glasses of the old people at the sidewalk tables. The ferris wheel jolted up another stage and they were suspended on the top, looking out across the rooftops to the midtown skyline, rising out of the baking city, an immeasurable distance from Italy, a fire in its own light.

'I broke into a store over on Canal Street near the Manhattan Bridge,' Ferenc said. 'The alarm went off. I didn't get much.'

'Too bad,' said Jenner.

'Yeah, I wish like hell I hadn't done it.'

'What did you take?'

He put a hand in a coat pocket and pulled out three rings. Two were fat carnelians, like wellings of blood, in ornate settings of gold. The third was a small diamond, less than half a carat, also set in gold. They shone in the palm of his hand. Jenner picked up the diamond and slid it onto her finger.

'One for me, and one for you, and one for the mayor of Kalamazoo.'

'Would you like it,' he said quickly. Jenner looked aside. 'Take it,' he hurried on. 'Take it. I want you to keep it.'

'Some other time,' she said, dropping the ring back into his palm. 'Who saw you at the store?'

'I don't know. I ran. There were some people on the sidewalk shouting behind me. I think they got a look at me. I saw the lights over here and came this way.'

'Easy, then. You're probably o.k. They won't know who they're looking for, and if you play the part right, you've got nothing to worry about.'

'I've been in trouble before,' he said. 'Not around here. Around home. I'm from Avenue D. But I've been told. One more time for anything and I get at least five years.'

'Well, this isn't the time,' said Jenner. 'I live near you, on Avenue B as a matter of fact, on the corner of Eleventh Street over the dry cleaner's. You'll have to come see me.We'll bake a Birdseye pizza to remember the fair.'

'Why do you act so good to me?' he asked her.

'Why did you break into that jewelry shop?' she said. 'You don't really need the money. Or do you?'

'Everybody needs money.'

'You broke in just for money? Didn't you get just a little kick out of it?'

'I said I wished I hadn't done it.'

The Ferris wheel was finally spinning and they swooped down the far, back side past the brick wall of a warehouse and a sign put up by 'The Seven Brothers' that showed a heavy moving van. She tugged his shirt as their seat buzzed the loading platform and he responded willingly, kissing her as they were pulled up again to the aerial view of the city.

'Are you an actress?' he said.

'What makes you ask?'

'You make me think of one, know what I mean?'

'Lot of people say that. I'm on TV every once in a while; nothing anyone would notice.'

He was satisfied about his guess. 'I *thought* you were an actress,' he said proudly.

'To tell you the truth I would never pass up the smallest chance to act,' said Jenner,' 'It's all I've cared about, ever. But I'm not good looking enough to get very far. The casting directors all shake their heads about me. 'Too bad about that one,' they say. 'She has it, but we have to have more than talent.'' So I work in an office.'

'You're no movie star,' he said, 'but you're a good looking girl. Haven't you got no husband?'

'I haven't even got no man,' said Jenner.

The ride was short because a longer line had formed below. When their seat stopped at the platform, Ferenc tried to give two more tickets to the operator but he wouldn't accept them. 'There's a big line here, Mac, sorry', the man said. 'You have to wait again if you want another ride.'

'The lady didn't tell me that when she sold me the extra tickets,' Ferenc said.

'Too bad. I'm sorry,' said the man. 'Nothing I can do about it.'

Jenner pulled Ferenc's arm. 'Don't argue,' she said. 'Do you want to collect a crowd? Give the tickets away. Here. Give them to me.'

They walked away from the ferris wheel, Ferenc still looking over his shoulder at the man who worked the lever. Jenner saw an old woman, at least eighty-five, in a black shawl, begging. 'Here,' she said to her. 'Here's four tickets for you. Enjoy yourself and stop working for a while.' The old woman took the tickets automatically, pinched them in her hand like a string of sausages and, with the same hand, crossed herself as she bowed twice in gratitude.

The police had moved on. Jenner and the boy let themselves be shoved along toward the principal intersection at Mulberry and Hester. They tripped over a baby stroller caught in the jam of people, the foolish mother looking helpless behind it, the helpless one-year-old looking up at the passing faces with an open mouth. Fathers had children on their shoulders, high school boys walked behind their girls with both arms around their waists. Fat women laughed at themselves as they tried to squeeze along between other people's hips. A little boy cried when a cigarette popped his balloon. The expectable odd beings were at the Fair of San Gennaro, too, the young men with Penguin Classics in their pockets who had beards to show but no accomplishments, other men in pairs, and three women together, one with close-cropped caramel hair and dressed in a riding habit, another a tall, smart-looking colored girl in a light trench coat, the third a prematurely grey women in her upper thirties who might have been the mother of two children at Rye Country Day, wearing a dark blue blouse with three buttons open, showing a good part of her large and freckled breasts.

Ferenc had begun to look around again, watching for the police.

'You shouldn't do that,' Jenner told him. 'The only way they'll find you from now on is if *you* look for *them*.'

'I still have to get out of here.'

'We'll manage that.'

'How?'

'We'll have to think. Look here; it's San Gennaro himself.' They were passing the shrine of the saint who owed his exaltation to the wild beasts that refused to eat him in a public amphitheater. The saint was made of gold-painted wood and to Jenner he looked a little like Buddha, housed in a huge porcelain frame that stood twenty feet tall and was covered with patterned sticks of fluorescent light. At the top was a coldly glowing fluorescent cross. 'Beautiful, beautiful,' said the people going by. More people kept coming up and humbly praising the lighted setting of the wooden saint. 'Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?'

Dollar bills, and fives, even some tens and twenties, hung down in long chains, paper-clipped together and suspended from San Gennaro's feet, cascading into pools of coins. August gentlemen in shining tuxedos stood at the idol's feet accepting the paper money and coins. For the coins they said, 'Thank you, thank you,' and for the bills they said, 'God bless you.'

Jenner saw a patrolman, half out of sight behind the men in tuxedos, there to guard San Gennaro and the cash. Gently pushing Ferenc, who was rooted to the sight of the money, she said, 'Come on over here, there's a game for you. I'll bet you can win at this one.'

Catty-cornered from the shrine of the saint, a concession charged twenty-five cents to test anyone's skill with a hammer and nail. Across the front of the stall, a rough heavy beam, eight by eight inches and made of dark, treated ash, bristled with nails, all standing ready with tips a quarter-inch into the wood. The concession was popular. While their wives looked on and laughed and joked, men with rolled up shirt-sleeves drove the nails. Jenner and Ferenc stood at one end of the beam and looked along the line at the pounding hammers and the nails going down into the wood.

The woman in the stall came over to them. She was middle-aged and wore rimless glasses and a money apron. 'One quarter,' she said. 'Want to try it? Get the nail all the way in up to the head in three hits

and you win a horseshoe magnet. If you get it in in two hits you get a rabbit's foot for your girl there; want to try?'

'What if I hit it once and it goes all the way?' said Ferenc.

The women in the stall pointed at the upper center of a set of shelves behind her, decked with the prizes. In a tilted, open cardboard box on a backing of purple felt was a crucifix and chain. 'Genuine gold plate,' said the woman. 'Worth maybe twenty, twenty-five dollars. You look like a strong boy. Want to try?'

Ferenc gave the woman a quarter, picked up a hammer and came down quickly and without all the preliminary sizing up, all the joking and sleeve-rolling preparation that was going on along the rest of the beam. The nail went in about half way. He hit it again, and the nail-head went down flush with the surface. 'Strong boy,' said the woman smiling at Jenner. She handed Ferenc a rabbit's foot with a chrome cap and chain.

Ferenc put down another quarter and the woman picked it up. He raised the hammer higher than before and smashed it down. It missed the nail altogether, leaving a smooth crater in the wood as if a coin had been pounded into it, flat side to, then taken away. Jenner didn't seem to notice. She had withdrawn a few steps and was staring silently at the nails with a sudden brooding look in her eyes. The stall woman laughed at Ferenc and said, 'You try too hard, a little easier next time.'

He gave her another quarter. The hammer went up and came down just as viciously as before, but this time the nail went into the wood all the way to the head. 'Ai,' said the woman. There was a murmur up and down the beam from the other men with hammers and the women beside them.

'A perfect one, a perfect one,' the woman called out loudly to all around, making the most of the publicity of awarding the highest prize. She climbed on an overturned wooden tub and reached for the golden crucifix, brought it down and handed it to Ferenc. He turned to give it to Jenner, but she was not beside him and had backed even further away. He walked over to her, took the crucifix out of its container and handed it to her, with the rabbit's foot.

'It's for you,' he said.

She smiled just a little. 'Thank you, Frank. You're really good. They should keep you away from here or you'd clean them out.

Then she kissed him and walked around to the back of the booth. 'Stay there, Frank,' she said. 'When things start happening, you go.'

Before he could follow, she walked into the booth, around the shelves of prizes, past the woman concessionaire in the money-pocketed apron, and climbed up onto the wooden beam itself. She gave the crowd a broad, professional smile and stepped carefully among the stands of nails. She began to twirl her prizes on their chains, the crucifix in one hand, the rabbit's foot in the other. Jenner had beautiful slim legs and some men whistled. She took, on the slouch of a streetcorner whore, slid her skirt up above one knee, and spoke out of the side of her mouth. 'Twenty-five cents,' she called. 'Come on, ladies and gentlemen, just two bits. Step up and crucify the Lord. Play it. Play it. It's the crucifixion game.' Jenner's bluish eyelids fluttered and she laughed, shifting the rabbit's foot to her other hand and twirling it there with the crucifix.

'Police, police,' called the stall woman. 'Are you crazy girl? Get off of there.' The woman tried to push Jenner off the plank but Jenner danced aside, knocking down about fifty nails as she went. The crowd only stared in awe.

'Step up,' said Jenner. 'One quarter. Drive the nail in two blows and you win all the luck in the world, a genuine, imported rabbit's foot. See, here's one. Come right along and try. All the way in one blow and you get a crucifix plated in pure gold.' She had to dance away from the woman again. An enormous surge of the curious pressed in toward the stall and with them the patrolman from across the intersection who was guarding San Gennaro. More police came.

Looking for her fugitive friend, Jenner saw him moving backward through the people, away from her. Because he was so tall, she could keep track of his head among the throng. Up Hester Street, she could see, too, the red light spraying out from the bubble on the top of a squad car, and the police who had been stationed there now shoving their way into the center of the crowd to see what was causing the disturbance.

'Cast your robes aside,' she called to the crowd and winked her eyes. 'Take off your robes, peel off your seamless stockings, come crucify the Lord Jesus.'

The police were almost at the stall. Ferenc had made his way through the crowd to the far edge.

'Get her, get her,' cried the concession woman, who had seen a

policeman at last. Three other patrolmen reached the wooden beam at the same time. 'What's the idea, sister?'

'Crucify the Lord,' Jenner shouted with a bright smile, looking out over the heads of the crowd. The smile went away all at once. Her eyes had continued to follow Ferenc. Over by San Gennaro, the men in the tuxedos had left their positions at the saint's feet to stand on the curb on their toes and try to see what was going on. Jenner saw Ferenc step into the fluorescent glow by the wooden image and pluck the chains of paper-clipped one, five, ten, and twenty dollar bills. He stuffed the money into his jacket and bolted away, running up Hester Street, toward the empty squad car with the flashing red light. Some people saw him and seemed to cry out; the noise of the crowd was too great for Jenner to hear their shouts.

'I said what's the idea, sister?'

Jenner looked down at the policeman at her feet. 'Idea, officer?' she said in a smooth, secretarial voice. 'That's one for the book.' She kicked away some nails, sat down on the beam and dropped easily onto the street.

'It sure is,' said the patrolman, 'Come on.' And they walked away together.

The stall woman rattled the coins in her apron pockets and picked up the fallen nails. Trying to smile at the people standing near her wooden beam, she shook her head and made circles with a finger by her ear. 'Twenty-five cents,' she called out. 'Who wants to try?'

But word had by now spread all the way through the crowd and the people were ebbing from the nail-and-beam stall, pressing toward the opposite corner of the intersection to see for themselves where the thief had stripped the folding money from the treasury of San Gennaro.

The boy from the village

by Seamus O'Neill

The boy from the village pushed aside the foliage and gazed down into the water. At first he could see nothing in the dim light under the shade of the bushes. But when his eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom he suddenly spotted a big trout lying in the depths behind a rock. He held his breath as he stretched out his hazel fishing-rod, and let the fly descend slowly on the water. The trout did not stir. It seemed to ignore the fly. The boy raised his rod, and hopped the fly on the surface of the water a couple of times. The trout rose like a flash and grabbed the tantalizing insect with such violence that the boy was too surprised to strike. But he had no need to. The trout had hooked himself. When the boy realised that, he seized the line with his left hand, and landed the fish. He removed the hook, stuck his thumb in the mouth of the fish, and broke its neck.

He was elated. He felt he had performed a worthy feat. But he was only beginning. He was threading a cord through the jaw of the trout when the other boys came up.

'My! I never saw one as big as that before,' said one of the boys, 'where did you get it?'

'Just there,' said the boy from the village proudly, pointing toward the rock.

'It would make a grand feed for anyone,' said the other boy, 'I wonder if there's any more in the river as big as him.'

'I'm sure there is,' said the boy from the village.

'That's my trout,' exclaimed a big lump of a red-haired fellow, suddenly snatching the fish.

'How could it be yours?' screamed the boy who had killed it.

'This is me father's field, and we own this bit of the river,' answered the red-haired lad, 'the fish belongs to me.'

The boy from the village looked round at the faces that ringed him. He saw the stony stare of hostility in every face. These were country lads, and he knew that a boy from the village need expect no mercy from them. A fit of anger and despair gripped him, and he made a frenzied effort to snatch back the trout. But the big red-haired lad struck him a blow on the mouth that brought blood to his lips, and another boy tripped him with his foot so that he fell heavily to the ground. He sprang up immediately, but was felled a second time. He lay on the bank sobbing, his heart thumping.

'Gi' me my trout,' he pleaded, 'Gi' me my trout. It's mine, I want to bring it home to my mother. She's sick in bed.'

The red-haired lad looked down at him sullenly. He did not speak.

'The two of ye shouldn't have made at him,' said a third boy.

'It was four village brats set upon me one day,' answered the red-haired lad.

'Gi' me my trout. It's mine,' whimpered the boy from the village. 'I want it for my mother, she's sick in bed.'

'How do we know your ma is sick?' said the red-haired lad.

'She's sick alright,' said the third boy, 'I heard my ma saying it. She's got consumption.'

'She has not,' sobbed the boy on the ground, 'but she's sick.'

'Alright,' said the red-haired lad, 'if you mother's sick with consumption, you can have the fish,' and he threw it on the bank, 'we'll all go fishing.'

'We'll all go fishing,' said the third boy, 'and we'll get him plenty of trout for his ma.'

'Where are ye'r fishing rods?' asked the boy from the village, sitting up.

'We don't need any fishing rods,' shouted the red-haired lad, 'we'll catch them with our hands under the stones.'

'Ya, we'll get them under the stones,' chorused the other boys, and they began to take off their boots.

'I'm afeard you'll scare the trout,' said the boy from the village.

'We won't scare them,' said they.

But they did. They did not catch even one. Nor did the boy from the village get another.

'I'll get him fish alright,' boasted the red-haired lad, 'I'll get him fish for his ma.'

'How?' said one of his pals, 'with a net?'

'Where'd I get a net?' answered the red-haired lad, and he laughed scornfully.

When the boy entered the room to show the trout to his mother, she sat up in the bed.

'Ough,' said she, 'wherever did you get such a fine big trout?'

'I caught it,' said he proudly, 'I caught it meself, isn't it a nice one?'

'It's a nice one, and a big one at that,' she replied, 'it's like the trout

we used to catch when I was a young girl. I didn't know that there was any trout in the river any more. There's nothing as tasty as a bit of fresh trout.'

'It was for you I caught it, mother,' said the boy, 'I heard you saying the other day you'd like a bit of fresh fish.'

You're a good boy,' she said, and she lay down again.

'You didn't finish it?' said her daughter looking at the remains of the trout on the plate.

'I ate nearly all of it,' replied her mother, 'but there was enough for three in that trout. It is a long time since I ate as much, you should have divided it. There's nothing as tasty as a bit of fresh trout.'

'I'll get another one for you to-morrow, mother,' said the boy.

'You will indeed, with the help of God,' murmured the ailing woman.

He went off again on the following day with his rod and line, and he made for the same spot in the river. He pushed aside the foliage, and peered down into the dark depths of the pool. He could see no trout. When he was certain that there wasn't one lying under the bank, or one resting behind the rock, he moved up-stream to a likely run he knew. He cast out again and again, but no trout rose. But then he saw a trout, and when his gaze fell on it, he stared at it in surprise and unbelief, for this trout was floating on the surface of the water with its silver belly turned to the sun. The boy realised the trout was dead.

'What a pity!' said he to himself, 'that would have been a fine one to catch. Maybe I'd have got him, if he'd been alive.'

The dead trout sailed slowly past, and the boy resumed his fishing. A minute or two later, another dead trout came floating by, its belly to the sun. The boy watched it until it was out of sight.

'What a pity!' he said again to himself. But then he forgot quickly about the dead fish, for he heard a clucking from the opposite bank, and a water hen pushed her way out from a screen of reeds and breasted the current. She was followed by a young one, and the two of them swam up and down gaily. The boy cast no more for fear of startling them, but stood there without a stir, delighting in their sport. How pretty the mother-bird was, black with her flash of red! How proudly she convoyed the young bird!

Suddenly they fluttered off in terror, for the solitude was rent by

noisy excited voices, and the boy from the village saw his tormentors of the previous day approaching. He was amazed to observe that each one of them was carrying a hank of fish.

'Did you get one at all?' asked the big red-haired fellow.

'I didn't yet,' replied the boy from the village.

'I don't think you'll get many the day,' added the red-haired fellow, 'at any rate, you won't get many that way,' said he, and the rest of them laughed.

'Now,'said he, 'all of yours are to give him a trout for his mother, she's got consumption.'

'She has not got consumption, she has not,' shouted the boy from the village, in appealing vexation.

'No matter, she's not well,' said the red-haired fellow, 'we'll give her her fill of fish, here's the first one,' and he reached the boy from the village a fine trout. The other lads did the same.

'Wait, and I'll fix them for you,' said the red-haired fellow, and in a minute he had half a dozen trout strung together.

'Where did ye get them' asked the boy from the village.

'In the river, where else?'

'How did ye catch them?'

'With our hands.'

'With your hands?'

'With our hands to be sure,' said the red-haired lad, 'but I put a fist of lime in the water last night,' and he laughed and all his companions laughed.

'Did you catch all them?' asked his sister when the boy from the village got home that evening.

'I didn't,' said he, and he told her how he had come by them.

'Maybe they're not good now,' said she, 'I think they feel very stiff.'

'Ther's not a haporth wrong with them,' said he, 'it was only last night he limed the river I dont' think they're right dead yet.'

I'll fry one for her at any rate,' said she, 'she didn't eat a bite today, the creature! But you had better not breathe a word to her about the lime. She might be afraid of the police. Say you caught two or three.'

'Did you get a trout at all today son?' asked his mother from the bed.

'I did,' said he, 'three!'

'Three!' said she, 'isn't it you that is the great fisherman, why don't you show them to me?'

He went out to the kitchen again slowly and brought in three in a dish.

'Well! well!' said she, 'aren't they the big ones? I don't think I ever saw trout as big as them, except once in my life, a long time ago–a summer there was a great drooth, and only a trickle of water in the river, the fish were dying!'

His heart began to beat violently. She took the dish from him and smelt the trout, but she only said, 'We'll have a fine dinner today on them,' and reached him back the dish, and lay down in bed.

He fled from the room.

'Did she not eat any of the trout?' he asked when his sister returned to the kitchen with his mother's plate.

'She just nibbled at it. She said she had no appetite today. It was a novelty for her yesterday, the creature!'

'Do you think she smelt the lime?' said he in torture.

'You'd never know,' said she.

Two English Ladies and a Portuguese by Philippe Jullian

Conversations at the Royal Court Theatre*

WITH WILLIAM GASKILL & JOHN DEXTER

by Robert Rubens

William Gaskill and John Dexter are two of the most vital directors in England today. They are both on the staff of the Royal Court Theatre, where they have directed numerous plays by the new group of playwrights who have been bringing about a striking change in the English theatre.

With the Royal Court as its center, providing an outlet for such singular talents as John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter, the British theatre is moving further away from the stratified, drawing-room 'naturalism' of Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan. It is an important break, significant of many basic changes that have been taking place in English life in the last ten years. Dexter and Gaskill, as directors being deeply involved in the new movement, are an integral part of this development in the English theatre.

William Gaskill, highly articulate, university-educated, with a direct forceful manner, is considered by many to be one of the more intellectual of the younger directors. He has directed EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON by John Osborne and A RESOUNDING TINKLE by N. F. Simpson, and was at the time of the interview working on an Elizabethan drama to be produced in Cambridge.

John Dexter is animated, candid and surprisingly self-effacing. When I watched a rehearsal of THE KITCHEN, I was struck by the seemingly effortless way in which he was able to manipulate a huge cast into a frenzy of activity and emotional tension. He seemed to do it mainly through an instinctive sense of timing and a constant sense of humor. He teases his actors, jokes with them, creating an interplay of emotional response, which enables him to achieve precisely the effects he wants.

WILLIAM GASKILL

Interviewer: Mr. Gaskill, how did you begin in the theatre?
Gaskill: I began like almost every British director – in the universities. I directed amateur productions during my three years at Oxford, and

* **Editor's note: This is the first in a series of interviews with English, American, and European stage directors, playwrights, and choreographers.**

then I went to Paris to study for a year. (I went through an intensely Francophile period.) After that I came back and went into provincial rep. I stage-managed, acted, and directed in about five repertory companies. Later I went into commercial television (when it first started) directing such things as zoo programs for children. It was about this time that I did a Sunday night production at the Royal Court. It was N. F. Simpson's A RESOUNDING TINKLE. They liked that very much and I was asked to go on the staff of the Court. I stayed there as a permanent member of the staff for about two years, directing such plays as EPITAPH FOR GEORGE DILLON, Osborne's first play, and others by Simpson and Arden.

Int: Have you found many changes in the English theatre in the last ten years?

Gaskill: Well, in the last five years, not in the last ten. All of my working life in the theatre has been since the war; and in this time there seems to have been quite definite 'periods'. The first period, about the time I was an undergraduate, was the time of actors returning from the war, of the big classical revivals at the Old Vic, of Gielgud's season in the Haymarket, and of the dominance of H.M. Tennent Ltd. That period was marked, in creative writing by the works of the poetic school: Fry, Eliot, and, to some extent, Whiting.

Then came 1956, the founding of the Royal Court, and the historic date of LOOK BACK IN ANGER. Of course, Joan Littlewood had been working in the provinces for a much longer period before this, but her work came to London and reached fruition at about this time. So we had these two parallel movements emerging at more or less the same time – that is, about ten years after the war.

The changes are probably more marked for us in England than they would be for people coming in from outside, because, in a way, we were far behind many other movements that had taken place on the Continent. I would say that the last foreign dramatists to make any serious impression on the English theatre were . . . Chekov and Ibsen. Pirandello, who is the mainspring of nearly all modern French dramatic writing has never been revived successfully in England and has never had any major influence here. Similarly, the kind of social writing of Odets and the Group Theatre didn't really penetrate England. Though, indeed, there is a long tradition of working-class and middle-class

theatre which dates back to the repertory movement of about 1910, the period of HOBSON'S CHOICE and HINDLE WAKES, the classics of what are now called the Manchester School. Incidentally, these plays have had an interesting revival recently on television, and they bear a strong resemblance to the early plays of Osborne.

Int: You don't feel, then, that the social works of Odets, Rice, and the Group Theatre in New York have had much influence here?

Gaskill: No, not really. Almost everyone read THE FERVENT YEARS by Harold Clurman at one time or another; but though one could argue that Wesker as a writer has affinities with Odets, I don't think one could call it a definite influence (he's really much more like Chekov) anymore than one could state that Ionesco was the dominant influence on N. F. Simpson, or Beckett on Pinter. I remember talking to Simpson when I first directed A RESOUNDING TINKLE and he assured me he had never read or seen any Ionesco. Anyone with half an eye can see that his work is much more influenced by Lewis Carroll. I think the changes in dramatic writing have been created more by the social mood of the times than by any direct literary influence from abroad . . . unlike France where a writer like Pirandello has had a definite and marked influence on a literary group.

Int: Then you feel that neither the experimental plays of Ionesco, Genet, etc. nor the American social realism have had any tangible influence here, and that the new drama in England is more or less a natural evolvement?

Gaskill: Yes, I think it has been almost entirely a product of social and cultural change. I think England tends to reject literary influences rather strongly.

Int: Why is this?

Gaskill: Because it is an island, and England has an insular tradition – and it is still very suspicious of foreigners. I know it's a music-hall joke that the English don't like foreigners, but there is a basic truth in it. They tend to create for themselves. I think much of the new movement has been a discovery of England by the English, and I think this is what is so puzzling to people outside; they say, 'Well, it's not all that new'. It may not be to them but it is to us. You have to remember that up to 1956 working-class parts were *always* comic, that actors never used a regional accent in a straight part, and that plays did only depict one

section of society. The exploration of new areas of society in drama has been one of the main creative forces in the movement. Naturally this means that many of the plays have a regional or insular quality which makes them puzzling to foreigners and I wouldn't say that many of the plays are international masterpieces. We may enter a phase where the writing here reaches an international standard, and I think perhaps we have already entered that phase.

Int: Having been so closely associated with this new movement, what would you say the new playwrights are actually trying to achieve?

Gaskill: Well, what any writer tries to achieve at the time he writes – to show 'the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'. With Arnold Wesker, for instance, there is a quite definite political motivation; he wishes to make social change through his work, but I think he's exceptional. I don't think this is true of Osborne, Simpson, or Pinter, or Arden. They are all socially aware and could, if you like, be described as socialists, but I don't think they are writing with a social function to the degree that Odets was writing.

Int: You once said that these people are striving for a 'new architecture' in drama. Could you explain what you meant by that?

Gaskill: I think there has been a lot of misunderstanding about the new writing, because much of it has been dismissed as being imperfectly constructed, as not composing a 'well-made play'.

A 'well-made play' is the invention of those people who admired the work of Ibsen, or who have come to admire the work of Ibsen seventy years after it was written. As Simpson said to me when he was watching ROSMERSHOLM, 'It's all very well, but the admiration that people are now lavishing on this play comes 70 years too late. If they had been onto it at the time, it might have been worth something'. In fact, what people mean is that the new plays are not written in the form of Ibsen. They have not stopped to consider that every play in its own time finds its own form. If you take the structure of a Greek tragedy, you will find it is not that of a 'well-made play'. I think certainly that writers like Pinter and Simpson are striving to find a new form which is expressive of what they feel about the time. I don't know how well they are succeeding. I think perhaps they are still groping towards it . . . but it is certainly not the structure of the three-act tragedy, whatever it may be.

JOHN DEXTER

Interviewer: Could you tell us something about your beginnings in the theatre?

Dexter: My beginnings in the theatre were amateur and provincial, and I became aware of the theatre later than most. I left an English elementary school at the age of fourteen, less than half educated, and almost unaware that drama could impinge on my life at all. You must remember that in 1939 there was little or no cultural activity in the provinces; it took the blitz to force the theatre out of London. Repertory did exist in some towns, but not in mine . . . and certainly none of my teachers at school ever suggested one should visit a theatre rather than a cinema. Then suddenly in the space of a few months I went to The Old Vic, Sadlers Wells, and saw *The Doctor's Dilemma*. This was a tremendous *physical* thrill. But it was not until I was eighteen and going into the army that I felt I could be a part of this activity. It seemed to be the exclusive domain of people who 'spoke nicely' (I didn't), and of people who were educated (I wasn't). After the war I worked unpaid and once or twice I was even paid. Small parts followed, then some larger ones; but I'll let you imagine the effect of Derbyshire vowels on the works of Coward and Maugham. Even at this time my work and thought were confined to a recreation of West End manners and conditions – in the chaos of weekly repertory there was time for nothing more. It was in one of the many periods of resting (I wasn't a very good actor) that I began to read and explore theatre south of the Trent and the Thames.

Int.: Then could you explain the ways in which your experience as an actor prepared you for directing?

Dexter: Well, I was conscious that, as an actor, I was alright, but nothing more. I was also conscious that the directors – the people who were telling me what to do – weren't really being much help. I suppose I am always most aware of the actor's deep need to relax. Only from confidence and relaxation can the imagination flow. I aim to create time and atmosphere in which this can happen, and in which I can be aware of the actor's needs before he is aware of them himself.

Int: When I watched your rehearsal of THE KITCHEN the other day, I noticed that you certainly do achieve a relaxed atmosphere. You

seem to do this partly through a constant sense of humor; joking and laughing with the actors as you direct them. Is this part of your particular formula for directing?

Dexter: I don't think there can be a formula, except that which emerges during rehersal and changes with each play. Kazan said that rehearsals are a love affair between the director and the cast. I think it's more of a calculated courtship with love at the end if you're successful. I must know an actor or actress very well before I can work with them. I must understand what they laugh at, if they don't laugh at all, where they come from, how they think politically.

I don't think actors are really difficult people. I think, oddly enough, that in most cases they are rather shy. They are not quite the sort of extroverts they are popularly imagined to be. Even the most experienced actor needs coaxing and easing into a performance.

So, really the most important, and in some ways the most harrowing, aspect of directing a play is in the casting. Technical ability is easy to discover, but imagination, flow of feeling, rhythmic patterns, personal tensions – these take a great deal of time and expenditure of nervous energy in order to comprehend. Finally, if all the qualities I seek are evident, but I have no personal response to the artist, I must begin all over again.

Int: Your approach to directing, in other words, is more intuitive than cerebral.

Dexter: I think it must be, because intuition is all I've got; so that's what I must work with. It's no use my trying to make myself a cerebral director – whatever that is – because I am simply not that sort of person. Having had the advantage of not having had a university education, I think I should use it. Although this may give me an uncluttered approach to certain directorial problems, it also makes me a rather risky proposition for commercial managements who cannot risk thousands of pounds on the chance that my intuition may be right. That is why I am happiest at the Royal Court. The atmosphere is relaxed, there is time to experiment and to grow slowly with a company. One has freedom and responsibility in a way I have found nowhere else.

Int.: How do you feel about the Stanislavsky method of acting?

Dexter: I have never worked with a Stanislavsky method actor, and I don't know anyone who has. The books contain more practical com-

mon sense than is generally supposed by those who incessantly quote rom him. I have worked with one or two actors who imagined hemselves to be method actors, and I didn't think much of them. They end to work in a much too self-indulgent fashion for my taste; everyhing is related to their own personal experience and the imaginative actor is almost totally ignored. I believe imagination is far more mportant for an actor than experience.

nt: You have been called a social-realist director. Do you think this is n accurate description?

Dexter: Oh, dear, how I hate this definition game. What do they mean by social realism? If Felsenstein is regarded as the apotheosis of the socialealist director, then I accept the title. But I try to react to each play on ts own terms. I feel, for instance, that I responded to Wesker's THE ITCHEN, which on the surface looks like very social-realist writing, by trying to create something quite unreal. I was aiming at a kind of ormalism, through the use of a bare stage, exposed lighting, and the most deeply theatrical of all techniques – mime. I wanted the audience o be constantly aware of a theatrical recreation of a kitchen; not of a lat photograph which can be seen through any hotel basement window. Anyone seeing the play should realize that it is hardly realism, in spite of the definite social awareness of the author.

The fact is that I am not necessarily a 'social-realist' director at all. don't really know what sort of director I am and I hope I never will.

nt: You directed Lillian Hellman's TOYS IN THE ATTIC, which was ighly praised in New York. Could you explain why it failed in Lonlon?

Dexter: Yes, I suppose I could. We can always explain our failures, and certainly learned more from TOYS IN THE ATTIC than from any ther play I have directed. It was a total failure for which I was more han three quarters responsible.

I suppose an English director is always faced with this problem in American plays; especially anything as particularly American and as complete as TOYS IN THE ATTIC. I know now that I shouldn't have ackled it, not having absorbed a good deal more of that particular background. In any play. I always have to come back to intuition and magination. In this particular case, my intuition was right; my imaginaion wasn't rich enough to interpret things completely alien to my

experience. It is a question of how far you can step out of the realm of your personal experience. I have never been a Norfolk farmer, but I was able to interpret something there which was in Wesker's play. But I couldn't reach out and catch this atmosphere that Lillian had put down on paper. My imagination failed; it wasn't enough.

Then, of course, there was the problem of the cast. I was unable to contact the actors on the right level, partly because I was never certain myself of the style of acting the play needed, never at ease in the specialized millieu of Southern American decadence. Also, I think I was a little bit intimidated by the combined experience of the group of actors and actresses I had working with me. (If I had chosen them myself and knew them better, there might have been more harmony.) It was a splendid cast who worked very hard, but all in all, with one exception, I never made them completely confident in me. They did everything I asked them to do, and in many cases did it a great deal better than I could have asked; but what I asked wasn't enough, and the stimulus I gave them wasn't enough.

It isn't until after the disaster that you know what you should have done. It wasn't until the last week of rehearsal that I suddenly began to realize, after talking to Lillian, watching the play, and reading it again and again, that there had been this failing somewhere. Now I see that it was a failure of compassion, a failure of feeling. It isn't enough to admire and even love a play if you have no real compassion for the characters. One has to be with them all the time and I wasn't. I was outside them, intrigued, watching in a sort of cool, interested way, and no more than that.

ERRATUM

We wish to acknowledge an error in our Fall issue, THE TRANSATLANTIC REVIEW No. 7. The translations from Ungaretti which we ascribed to George Garrett were, in fact, done by Dora M. Pettinella whose work has been published in *Chicago Review, Prairie Schooner, Kansas Magazine* and in many other magazines. We offer our apologies to our readers and, above all, to Miss Pettinella. The Editors.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

UGO BETTI, 1892–1953 was brought up in Parma, volunteered in World War I and was taken prisoner at Caporetto. He entered the Magistracy and became a judge in Rome, where he died. Author of several volumes of poetry and short stories but is best known outside Italy for his plays, many of which have been translated and performed in English.

RICHARD BURNS was educated at Mill Hill School and has just gone up to Cambridge. He was 16 when he wrote 'The Investigator' which was submitted for the British Short Story Competition.

YVONNE COENCA is 24 and lives in London. *Story* was submitted for the British Short Story competition.

DAVID CORNEL DE JONG has published poetry, a collection of short stories, and is now working on a novel.

L. M. EGGLESTON is an Australian journalist, aged 29 who worked in South Africa for four years because he wanted 'to see for myself if conditions were as they are described'. Now in London.

CAFFE FASSETT, comes from Big Sur, California and works in New York.

WILLIAM GOLDMAN is the author of three novels. His latest, 'Soldier in the Rain', was published in New York and London.

PHILIPPE JULLIAN has written and illustrated *Gilberte Regained* and, in conjunction with Angus Wilson, *For Whom the Cloche Tolls*, besides illustrating many other books.

JOHN MCPHEE is 30. was formerly editor of the *Princeton Tiger* and spent a year at Cambridge, England. Is now on the staff of *Time* and lives in New York City.

VASSAR MILLER, formerly an editor of the *New Orleans Poetry Journal* has published two books of poems, *Adam's Footprint* and *Wage War on Silence*.

HARRY MOORE-GORDON, an assistant art editor for *Vogue*, studied art in Edinburgh. His drawings have also appeared in the *London Magazine*.

HARRY MORRIS is at Tulane University, New Orleans and has published poetry in several magazines.

WILHELM NIEMÖLLER born 1928 in Schleusselburgh, Germany, works for Anglo-Germon Book Centers in Germany. Painter as well as poet, has exhibited in various cities. His poems, written in English, appeared often in *Botteghe Oscure*. Niemöller is the nephew of the famous pastor.

SEAMUS O'NEILL writes in Gaelic and has published two collections of stories and a novel in Ireland. He is his own translator.

BORIS PASTERNAK, the great Russian writer and Nobel Prize Winner. These three poems are printed here for the first time but will appear in a volume to be published by the Oxford University Press in the spring of 1962.

ROBERT RUBENS was educated at the Friends' Select School in Philadelphia and at Bard College. He has been a film critic, and now lives in London.

OWEN SCOTT, typographical designer and artist who did the cover for Nos. 6, 7 and 8 of *Transatlantic Review* has now returned to New York.

PETER SHRUBB was born in Australia in 1928, has done post-graduate work at Stanford University and is at present teaching English in Sydney.

JON SWAN writes serious poetry and does humorous drawings.

JOHN UPDIKE, who lives in Ipswich, Massachusetts, is the author of a volume of short stories, a collection of poetry, and two novels, *The Poorhouse Fair* and *Rabbit, Run.*

FLORENCE VICTOR born Sept. 26, 1935 in Brooklyn, New York. She worked for a while in New York Public Library before receiving a scholarship to Brandeis University. Her poems have appeared in *Commentary, Western Review, Wormwood Review.*

EUGENE WALTER is Southern writer-editor who lives in Rome. His new novel, *Love you good; see you later* will appear in Italian and German translations in 1962. *The Gumbo Cult* in this issue is from a cookbook, *The Happy Table.*

WILLIAM WEAVER, a Virginian, long resident in Rome, is a music critic and editor of the Italian Magazine, *Discoteca.*

ELLEN WILBUR, daughter of Richard Wilbur, is 17 and this is her first published story. She lives in Middletown, Connecticut.

EITHNE WILKINS and ERNST KAISER, Eithne Wilkins, a former Scholar of Somerville College, Oxford, and Ernst Kaiser, who came to England as a political refugee in 1939 were jointly awarded in 1953 a fellowship for research and translation by the Bollingen Foundation, which has continued to support their studies. For some years they have been in Rome, under the benevolent wing of the American Academy, preparing an edition of the posthumous chapters of *The Man without Qualities* and other manuscripts.

Transatlantic Review No. 8

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